

Video Watchdog®

the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 90

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THE OTHERS

Kay Linaker At War with
Tod Browning & James Whale!
Lynch! Hitchcock! Del Toro!

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Video Watchdog®

the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 90 / DEC 2002

*"If art is to nourish the roots of our culture,
society must set the artist free to follow his
vision wherever it takes him."*

—John Fitzgerald Kennedy

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She lived next door to **FREAKS** director Tod Browning during his early years of retirement, and was a featured actress in two films directed by **FRANKENSTEIN**'s James Whale—including his last! What were these mysterious figureheads of 1930s fantastic cinema really like, and why did their careers come to such abrupt and early ends? After decades of speculation, actress *Kay Linaker* provides the answers to these questions (and others) in a fascinating interview about Hollywood's WWII years!

Front: Nicole Kidman guards the gates of her haunted home in Dimension Home Video's **THE OTHERS**.

Inside: Tod Browning and Lionel Barrymore hold an informal script conference on the set of MGM's **THE DEVIL-DOLL** (1936).

Back: Mario Bava-like imagery found in **THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE**, **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** and **THE OTHERS**.

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KENNEL

ANTHONY AMBROGIO's story, "Solipsism," will appear in STILLWATERS JOURNAL (www.stillwatersjournal.com), February-March 2003.

JOHN CHARLES is the Associate Editor of VIDEO WATCHDOG, and a damn good one!

BILL COOKE teaches a course on the History of Horror Films at the University of South Carolina.

SHANE M. DALLMANN watches more horror movies in October than in any other month.

JOE DANTE is the director of **GREMLINS**, **INNERSPACE** and **GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH**, all now available on DVD from Warner Home Video.

NEIL JACKSON contributed to the ROBERT DE NIRO and CHRISTOPHER WALKEN MOVIE TOP TENS (Creation Books) and the CRITICAL GUIDES TO CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICAN DIRECTORS/BRITISH AND IRISH DIRECTORS (Wallflower Press). This is his VW debut.

HARRY LONG's monthly film music column for CLASSIC IMAGES is now in its fourth year.

TIM LUCAS wrote liner notes for **MARQUIS DE SADE'S JUSTINE** and **EUGENIE... THE STORY OF HER JOURNEY INTO PERVERSION** (Blue Underground).

KIM NEWMAN is writing a vampire film musical "in the tradition of **PLAYGIRLS AND THE VAMPIRE** and **DUCK SOUP**" for Denmark's Zentropa Pictures.

RICHARD HARLAND SMITH and Barbara Fish were married last September in Las Vegas. Congratulations, you two!

SAM & REBECCA UMLAND know that it's "Cliffs Notes"—not "Cliff Notes."

TOM WEAVER's most recent book is **SCIENCE FICTION CONFIDENTIAL** (McFarland and Company).

DOUGLAS E. WINTER's latest installment of "Audio Watchdog", amazingly, is his 70th entry.

MILES WOOD is an expatriate Briton writing about Italian Westerns from his home in Hong Kong.

VW THANKS:

All Day Entertainment (David Kalat), the CHFB, Juanita Bowman, Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment (John Singh), The Criterion Collection (R. O'Donnell), Dimension Home Video, Facets Video (Ray Privett), Image Entertainment (Spencer Savage), Key East Entertainment, Sanney Leung, Kay Linaker, McFarland and Company, MGM Home Entertainment (Steve Wegner), Midnight Marquee (Gary S. and Susan Svehla), Miramax Video, Mobius Home Video Forum (Todd Harbour), John Morgan, Paramount Home Video, Photofest, Poker Industries, Retromedia Entertainment (Steve Latshaw), Sinister Cinema (Greg Luce), George Stover, Tai Seng Video Marketing (Frank Djeng), 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Vanguard Films, Xploited Cinema (Tom Simonelli), our contributors, subscribers, distributors, correspondents, informants, and all the companies and reps (especially our friends at Anchor Bay and Something Weird!) who sent material that didn't get covered in this issue! Next time—we promise!

PHOTO SOURCES:

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THE WATCHDOG BARKS



COUPLE of editorials ago, I mentioned that Donna and I were courting the idea of acquiring a widescreen TV. Since then, a number of you have written, asking if we bought it and, if so, encouraging me to devote a future editorial to what it's like to live with one of these monsters.

Well, yes, we got it: a 57" Sony XBR Digital High Definition Projection TV—the first projection monitor we saw that did not look fuzzy or grow dimmer as we moved to the right or left of a straight-on vantage. Our previous television was a 31" Panasonic; I can vividly recall the first week or so that we owned it, about midway through the life of this magazine, and being unable to believe how fortunate we were to have such a beautiful thing. Upgrading to the Sony XBR has been much the same, only times 10: it took me a week—seriously, a week—to get past the guilt of acquiring such an extravagance and to give myself permission to enjoy it. The joy finally kicked in while watching a trailer for **EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS** on Columbia TriStar's **THE REVENGE OF FRANKENSTEIN**—it was in B&W, it was cropped to 1.85:1, but a vivid reminder of the thrill of seeing such images writ large on a matinee screen in the early 1960s.

I don't know if it's true of all widescreen sets, but the XBR has four frame settings: Normal, Full, Zoom, and Wide Zoom. "Normal" presents the fullframe image between two peripheral gray bars; a letterboxed image is thus presented with vertical gray bars and horizontal black bars. "Full" horizontally stretches a squeezed image to fill the frame; this works wonders with Region 2 DVDs that play back squeezed on Apex players. "Zoom" amplifies a letterboxed image to fill the frame; the image only fills the frame in the case of 1.85:1 transfers, so 2.35:1 still plays back with moderate black bars above and below. "Wide Zoom" is supposedly to enlarge 2.35 images to full frame, but I find this option distorts more often than not. One of the most beautiful discs I've watched to date, Anchor Bay's **DEMONS OF THE MIND**, is a 1.85 transfer that I expected to watch in Zoom mode, but for some reason, it loaded up squeezed

and then unfolded to be viewed in Full mode. A beautiful transfer of liquid perfection.

I'm told we're about six years away from real HDTV broadcasts, and I can now attest from personal experience that even with digital cable service, most incoming picture quality doesn't begin to equal DVD quality... yet. The networks may be offering some programs in widescreen mode, but most local affiliates are still saddled with antiquated equipment and sending out unrefined signals.

What I find most annoying, however, is that some DVD companies don't seem to have a clue as to what they're doing with anamorphic transfers. A perfect case in point is Miramax's new two-disc set of **A HARD DAY'S NIGHT**. The movie is still wonderfully enjoyable, and the quality of the anamorphic image is beyond reproach, but the framing—which mattes the original full aperture framing to 1.85:1—is atrociously obstructive. An owner of a 16:9 set can watch the disc in Normal or Zoom mode, but in this case, Normal mode only offers a smaller version of the pre-matted image. So why crop it? Zoom mode would automatically reconfigure the image to 1.85, and a fullframe transfer would have left the decision of how to view the film to the consumer. The only reason to matte the image is to impress the general public with *absolutely unnecessary letterboxing*. This is a complete reversal of the anti-letterboxing industry snobbery we had to suffer through 10-20 years ago. Letterboxing has become a trendy selling point for DVD, and is being forced on product that doesn't require it. Another problem I've noticed concerns subtitling. If a foreign-language film is anamorphically enhanced and subtitled below the frame, it cannot be properly watched in Zoom mode, because the subs will be cropped offscreen. I noticed this while viewing Columbia TriStar's DVD of **THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE**, and I appended this information to Richard Harland Smith's review of the film in this issue.

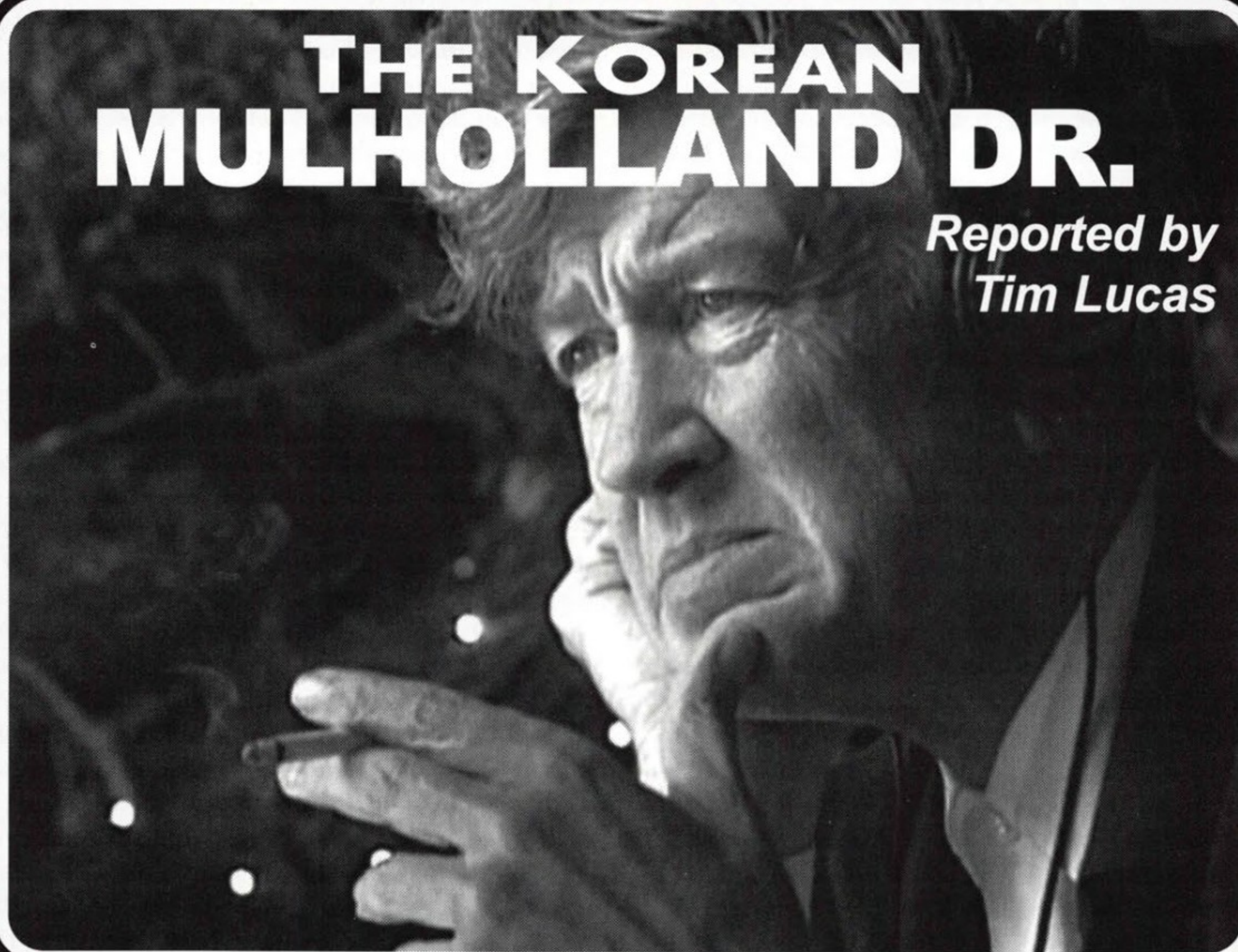
In short, I am glad I have my XBR, I am in love with it, and it has already opened my eyes to new problems. Therefore, it's helping me to do my job better—as a consumer guide and editor—so my new friend is bound to become your friend too.

..... **Tim Lucas**

WATCHDOG NEWS

THE KOREAN MULHOLLAND DR.

*Reported by
Tim Lucas*



As we all know, when Universal released David Lynch's **MULHOLLAND DR.** on DVD some months back, the disc reflected some edicts from the willfully mysterious writer/director. It contained no chapter stops, no supplementary features (other than a theatrical trailer), and a fleeting full-frontal nude shot of actress Laura Harring appeared with her pubic region digitally fogged. Worldwide, Lynch's fans began to anticipate the DVDs of the film that would eventually surface from other regions—and now, rewarding their patience, is

a new Korean DVD on the Star-max label (#SDVD-029, 146m 24s, NTSC, DVD-0) which breaks some of the rules Universal was obliged to abide.

First things first: Laura Harring is still digitally fogged. The Korean widescreen transfer is 16:9 enhanced and carries a clean Dolby 5.1 soundtrack, but would appear to have a somewhat lesser bit rate than Universal's glossier, more seductive presentation. The English soundtrack is complemented with removable Korean or English subtitles. But what makes the disc eminently collectable to Lynch fans is that

the feature has been given 20 chapter marks and a number of bonus contents. These may be not much better than lukewarm in value, at best, but no admirer of Lynch's most provocative film is likely to want to pass them by.

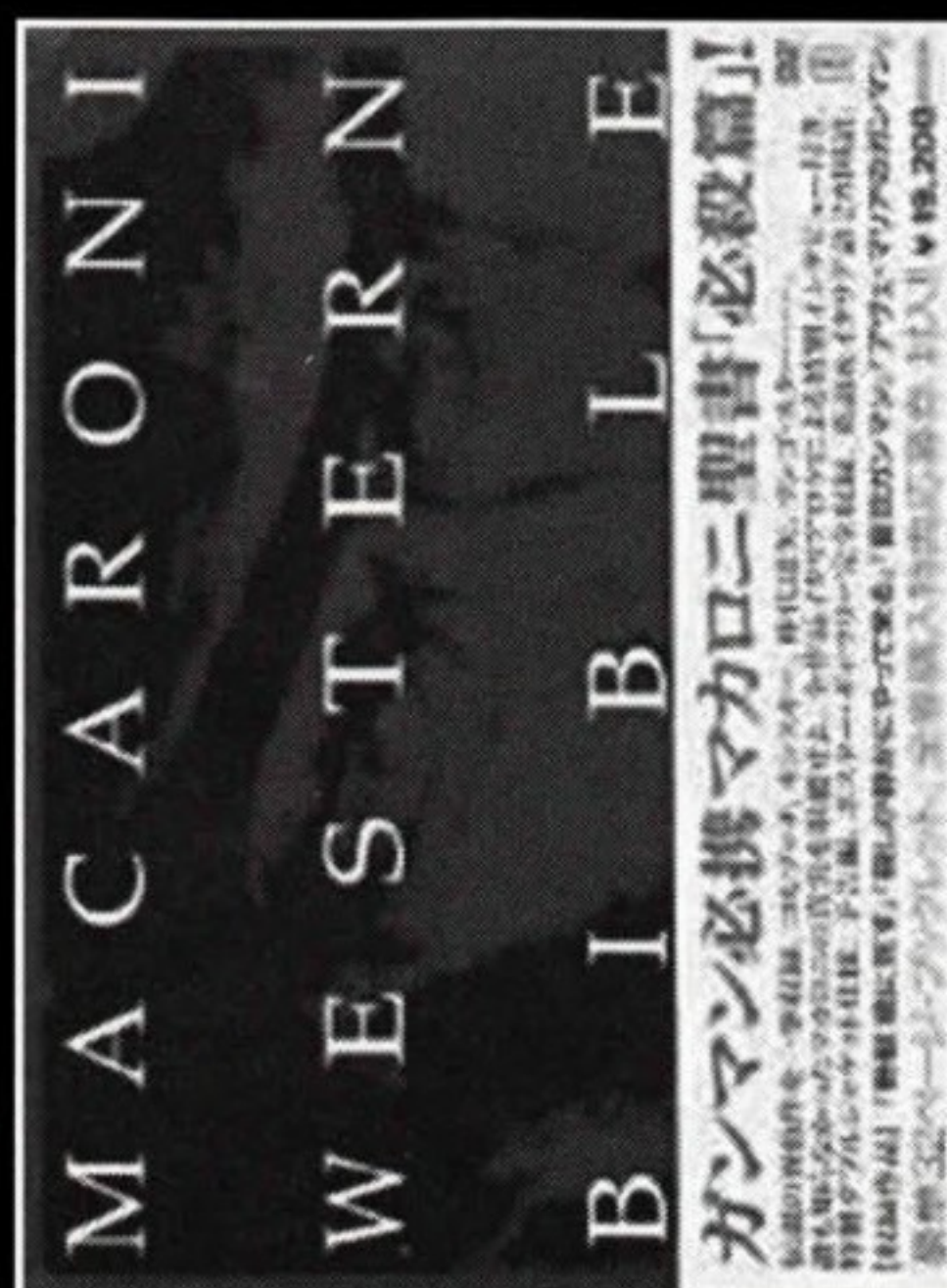
The "Special Features" menu begins with "Interviews," conducted with Justin Theroux (1m 39s), Laura Harring (2m 27s), Naomi Watts (4m 14s) and David Lynch (2m 52s); in the case of the actors, at least, the interviews

*David Lynch audits a video playback on the set of
MULHOLLAND DR.*

were filmed on the set during the evening of the last day of filming. These are generally enthusiastic in tone (the actors all wish they could go on working for Lynch forever) and not very revealing, but Lynch touches on something interesting when he mentions his love for the creative vibe he feels abounding in Los Angeles, where everyone has a screenplay to hawk and seems drawn there by a deep-seated need to express themselves. The next chapter, "Highlights," is an irrelevant gallery of clips from the feature—presumably the clips selected to promote the film on television. There is a music video of Linda Scott's "Every Little Star" (2m 16s), illustrated with clips from the film, and a modest Photo Gallery that frames a dozen or so color shots to appear behind the red curtains of the Club Silencio proscenium. The theatrical trailer is included, as on the US release, and there are also "Cast & Crew" and "Production Note" chapters, with text in Korean only.

By far the most interesting of the bonuses is "Making Film" (6m 19s), a choppy and non-linear bunch of windowboxed videotaped moments from the last night of shooting. A haggard Lynch, looking not unlike a two-eyed Nicholas Ray, is seen and overheard giving direction to his female leads during the blocking of two scenes, including the "betrayal" scene at the dinner party. One scene tends to cut to another as soon as the moments come to life, but the technique only makes the eye more eager to absorb the glimpses as they occur. There is also something about the non-illusory nature of video that makes Naomi Watts's performance even more nakedly impressive.

The Korean **MULHOLLAND DR.** is available online from Poker Industries (www.pokerindustries.com) for \$25.99, plus \$4.00 shipping within the US. VISA and MasterCard orders may be placed by phone (732-238-5969, 11:00am-8:00pm EST) or fax (732-238-8435).



Spaghetti With All the Trimmings

The enduring popularity of the Italian Western in Asia is nowhere more evident than in the realm of home video in Japan, where countless titles unavailable anywhere else in the world (except perhaps Greece, oddly enough) were released on VHS and laserdisc, more often than not correctly framed to reverently preserve their original scope vistas. 2002 sees a continuation of this trend with the release of no less than 20 Italian Westerns on DVD from SPO Entertainment.

The films are available both separately (¥4,800) and in five box sets called **MACARONI WESTERN BIBLE** (¥19,200 each), which house each disc in its own LP-style jacket, employing slightly different artwork to the single disc Amaray case releases and adding a 32 page booklet consisting of mainly Japanese text. While the handsome box sets may seem an enticing option, in fact all but one of the films included is available on disc separately and they offer

no cash savings, so the route that all but the most obsessive collectors should take is acquiring the single disc releases of the most desirable titles.

One of the most tantalizing of these releases is Sergio Corbucci's first foray into the genre, **MINNESOTA CLAY** (87m 41s). The 1965 film, starring Cameron Mitchell as an optically impaired gunman, instantly reveals that Corbucci's style—and indeed the Spaghetti Western itself—had yet to fully mature; one can almost feel the genre developing as **MINNESOTA CLAY**'s narrative unfolds, as it gradually steers a course different from its American counterpart. The film is letterboxed at 1.80:1 but, like all of these releases, is not enhanced for widescreen monitors; it looks okay and is offered in a choice of Italian and English Dolby Digital 2.0 mono (which requires turning up the volume control considerably higher than the norm), with Japanese and Italian subtitles. Perhaps even more precious than the restored framing is the inclusion of an epilogue never previously seen outside of Italy; the English language track reverts to Italian during this scene, in which the presumed dead Clay is revealed to be alive, pardoned and wearing spectacles. Initially seeming like an unnecessary tacked-on happy ending (these days it would be seen to be setting up the sequel), the parting shot of Clay throwing his eyeglasses up into the air and shooting through each lens actually has a stronger emotional impact than the more familiar final image of Clay lying in the muddy street. The film has been afforded 16 chapter stops, and extras include staff and cast profiles and 3 "columns" (all in Japanese), a gallery of 24 posters, lobby cards and B&W stills, an 11m 34s interview with composer Piero



Cameron Mitchell as a gunman losing his eyesight in Sergio Corbucci's MINNESOTA CLAY, available on DVD in Japan as part of the MACARONI WESTERN BIBLE.

Picconi in Italian with Japanese subtitles, a letterboxed English language trailer (1m 38s) full of old-fashioned hyperbole ("More Pulsating Suspense Than **HIGH NOON!**"), and the opening and ending of the English-language version taken from a videotape source.

Previous exposure to films directed by Ferdinando Baldi led to our low expectations for his films in this series, but his three offerings are the collective highlight of the initial MACARONI releases. The "musical comedy" **Little Rita nel West**, essentially a starring vehicle for Rita Pavone, is probably the last film prospective buyers of Spaghetti Westerns would consider, but even if the song and dance numbers (as irresistible and catchy as anything in **CAN'T STOP THE MUSIC!**) are not one's idea of what goes on round the campfire or in the saloon, there's a dead-on parody

of the graveyard shootout from **DJANGO**, and Terence Hill co-stars in what is clearly a prototype "Trinity" movie (**THEY CALL ME TRINITY** director Enzo Barboni here serves as cinematographer), so the more adventurous won't feel short changed. Letterboxed at 2.36:1, the 97m 14s feature is presented in Italian and English Dolby Digital mono 1.0 with Japanese, Italian and English subtitles. Extras include a gallery of 14 *locandine* and *fotobuste*, a 14m 12s interview with Rita Pavone and her husband Teddy Reno (who also appears in the film), a 6m 22s interview with Baldi conducted outside a cafe, in Italian with Japanese subtitles, a 3m 29s trailer, and a deleted musical number "*Per un corpo di pistla*" (which should occur after the graveyard shootout) taken from a near-fullscreen videotape source.

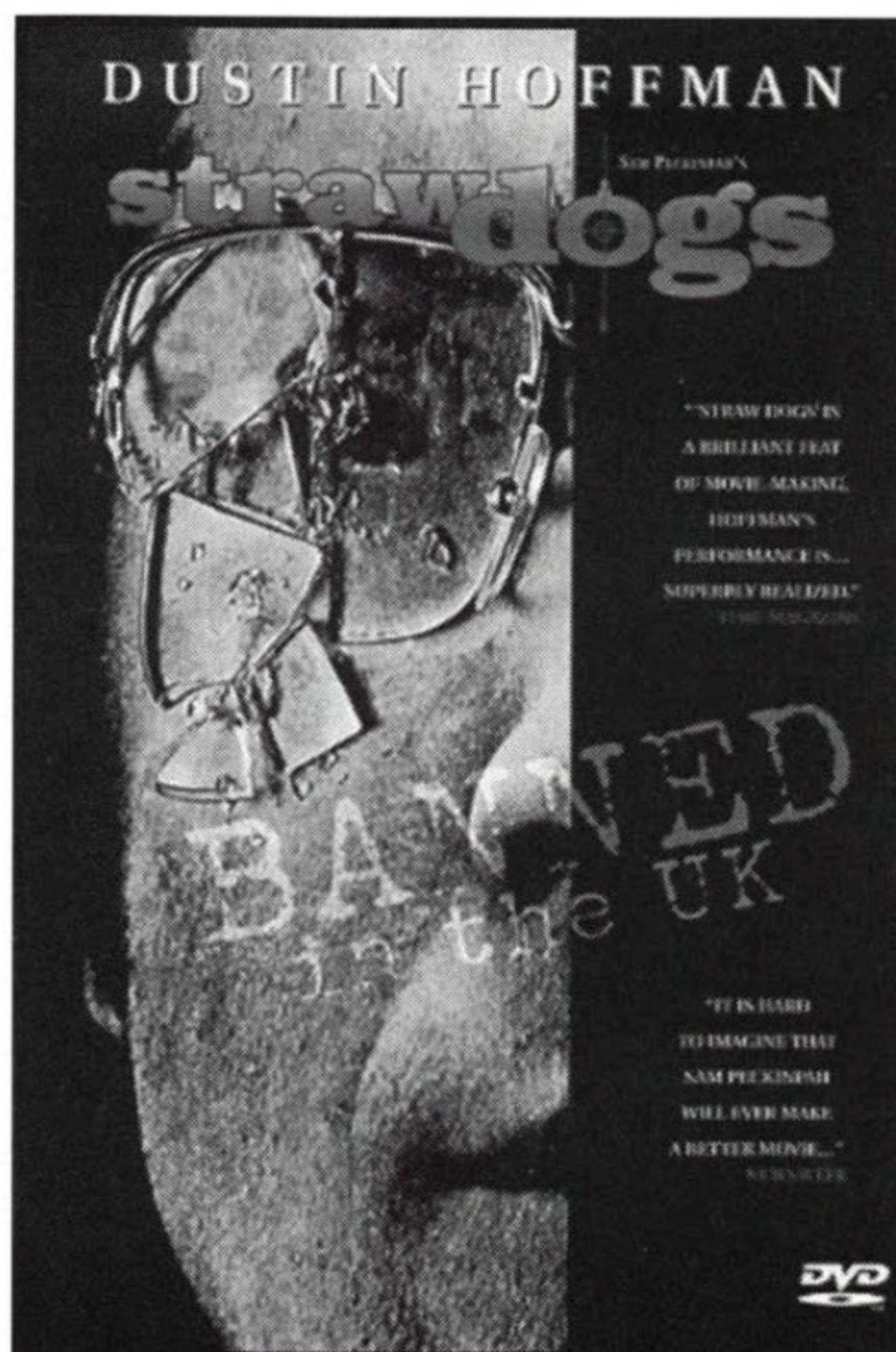
Were the ending of **MINNESOTA CLAY** intended to segue into a follow-up, **BLINDMAN** might seem to be that film, but in fact it's a fairly blatant re-planting of Zatoichi—the blind swordsman played by Shintaro Katsu who appeared in a series of films made by Daiei in the '60s and '70s—into the Western landscape. **BLINDMAN** (a film that has intrigued us ever since we discovered it in Lawrence Staig & Tony Williams' book *OPERA OF VIOLENCE* over 20 years ago!) initially disappointed us, but this was almost entirely due to having to watch the English language version (84m 17s, accessed through the special features menu) first. We recommend first time viewers also do this, if only to make sense of the plot (anyone familiar with the film will likely find the shorter cut a complete waste of

time), because—unlike most of the other films in the series—this disc offers *two completely different versions* of the film, with no English language/subtitle option for the longer cut. Clocking in at 101m 28s, the Italian language version (Dolby Digital mono 1.0), entitled **BLIND MAN**, looks appreciably sharper and measures out at about 2.39:1, compared to the 2.30:1 framing of the shorter cut. Possibly due to our inability to follow the Italian dialogue, it plays far less humorlessly than its English counterpart, seemingly refuting the assumption made in Phil Hardy's *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WESTERN MOVIES* that it was “intended as a parody of the Italian Western.” More importantly, it also ups the sex and violence ante considerably. Supplementary material includes a 23 page gallery, an Italian trailer (3m 30s) and a 20th Century Fox trailer (2m 46s), and 7m 15s more of interview footage with Baldi at the cafe.

A third Baldi film, rarely discussed even in specialist publications, ***Il Pistolero Dell' Ave Maria*** is undoubtedly the surprise package of the series. Less an oater than a Gothic Melodrama in Western clothing, its rich color palette is superbly rendered on what is probably the best looking of all the SPO discs we've encountered thus far. Running a scant 79m 59s, it's letterboxed at 1.86:1 and offered in a choice of Italian and English Dolby Digital mono 1.0 with Japanese, Italian and English subtitles. A measly Gallery of only 6 items, a 2m 51s trailer (with no sound or on-screen text) and another 6m 24 slice of the interview with Baldi make this disc feel somewhat lean, but it should be considered an essential purchase for anyone with serious interest not only in Spaghetti Westerns,

but in what might be called European Cult Cinema in general.

We will check out more of these SPO discs in a future issue, but we would be remiss not to also mention a tasty Japanese *hors-d'oeuvre* for these DVDs. *MACARONI POSTERS TAIZEN* is, as the cover explains, “A Fistful of Spaghetti Western Movie Posters from the collections of Yoshitaka Miyamoto and Yuji Saito.” 144 pages long, complete with index and bilingual (Japanese and English) introduction by Franco Nero, this volume offers 200 high quality full color reproductions, beginning with the Japanese poster of **A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS**, and including all of the films discussed above, each being identified with both Italian and English titles, the poster's country of origin, size and, whenever known, the name of the artist. Retailing at ¥3,800, this book will be worth, to many Watchdogs reading this, quite a few dollars more! —Miles Wood



The Final Straw?

After an 18 year absence from UK video stores, Sam Peckinpah's **STRAW DOGS** (1971) has resurfaced as a Region 2 DVD that may well prove to be definitive. Moreover, the film has emerged unscathed from the clutches of the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) despite the fact that, as recently as 1999, it was refused classification on two separate occasions. Ostensibly, this is the consequence of a much vaunted—but hotly disputed—new “liberalism” at the BBFC but the truth of the matter is perhaps more complicated.

The first of the 1999 BBFC rejections was based upon the submission of the American Rated cut by Total Home Entertainment (THE). The BBFC believed that this version (which removed most of the second rape) eroticized sexual violence and endorsed the myth of rape

victims who "like it, really." To their credit, THE accepted a complete rejection, refusing to cut the film. Just three months later, Video Collection International (who had in fact released the film uncut back in 1984, *before* the enforcement of the Video Recordings Act) planned a release of the UK X-certificate version (as seen on Anchor Bay's US release) Realizing the film had already been denied a certificate in a "softer" variant, they opted to accept another rejection from the board.

Therefore, the supreme irony of **STRAW DOGS** achieving a British release lies in the fact that it has finally been classified in a version *substantially more explicit* than the one they rejected only three years ago. Perhaps to their credit, the BBFC has placed faith in Peckinpah's original conception of the rape sequence, in which ambivalence and uncertainty are given full reign. In a press statement, the BBFC expressed their view that "The ambiguity of the first rape is given context by the second rape, which now makes it quite clear that sexual assault is not something that Amy (Susan George) ultimately welcomes." In a rare move by the British censor, a "more is less" stance has been adopted, with the multi-layered meanings generated by the retention of disturbing, unpleasant imagery actually seen to reduce the "harmful" potential of the film.

As if in celebration of the return of a long-lost errant son, Fremantle Entertainment has included an array of extras on its single disc presentation that should prove hard to top. Boasting an anamorphic 1.85: 1 transfer (slightly darker than the Anchor Bay edition), the **STRAW DOGS** DVD features two commentaries (one an illuminating

discussion by Peckinpah experts Paul Seydor, David Weddle and Garner Simmons; the other a more anecdotal insight by Peckinpah's former production associate, Katy Haber.) There are also videotaped interviews with Susan George, producer Dan Melnick and Simmons that provide another hour's worth of discussion. Inevitably, there are areas of overlap between the commentaries and the interviews, but overall, they complement each other beautifully. Furthermore, the disc contains an on location documentary (which has been choppy assembled from raw B&W footage, but is fascinating nonetheless), a US trailer, three TV spots, two radio spots, deleted scene information (which goes some way to explaining the oft used stills of Dustin Hoffman brandishing a shotgun in the village pub), location stills, publicity stills, lobby cards, posters, reviews, essays, various items of correspondence, filmographies and trivia.

Personal favorites from the supplementary items: the Spanish poster, which takes a literal-minded view of the film's title; the response from the Manchester police authorities to a passionate letter from British censor Stephen Murphy in 1972, which is a masterpiece of deadpan indifference; and Peckinpah's on-set response to an interviewer's reminder that Gordon Williams (author of the film's source novel, *THE SIEGE OF TRENCHER'S FARM*) had actively condemned the film before even seeing the finished product. To top off the presentation, the disc includes Jerry Fielding's atmospheric score in stereo on an isolated track. The disc acknowledgements proclaim the project to be a "labor of love," and it shows. —Neil Jackson



SOURCES

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- **Running Commentary by Bava Himself!**

MARIO BAVA

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TIM LUCAS

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VIDEO TAPEVINE

Lemonade Joe and The Rats' *Code of Honor*

CODE OF HONOR

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Yi ben wu yan (Mandarin)
"Chivalry Needs No Words"
aka **BROTHERHOOD, TRIAD
SAVAGES, TRIAD SAVAGER** (sic)
1987, Tai Seng Video Marketing,
HF, \$9.95, VHS
DD-1.0/MA/+, \$14.95,
DVD-0, 88m 1s

Although Tai Seng is presenting him as the star, Chow Yun-fat has only a supporting role in this dreary triad thriller, which hit HK screens a few months after **A BETTER TOMORROW** (1986) made him one of the most bankable stars in Asia. Veteran Taiwanese actor Ke Chuen-hsiang plays elderly ganglord Ho Chen-tung, who seeks to conduct his affairs in a civil fashion, a goal made difficult by his brutal underlings. A police inspector (Dick Wei), determined to see him behind bars to avenge the crippling of his brother (Lung Ming-yan), arrests some of Ho's men and convinces them to testify against him. Han (**LONG ARM OF THE LAW**'s Lam Wai), a Vietnamese refugee, who befriended Ho after saving his life years before, eliminates the three witnesses without Ho's permission. This forces the courts to dismiss the

gangster, for lack of compelling proof, but the police compile evidence suggesting that Ko ordered the murders. Chow (who only has about 10m of screen time) plays Ho's disillusioned son, who has chosen to live in Australia, rather than be a party to his father's ways.

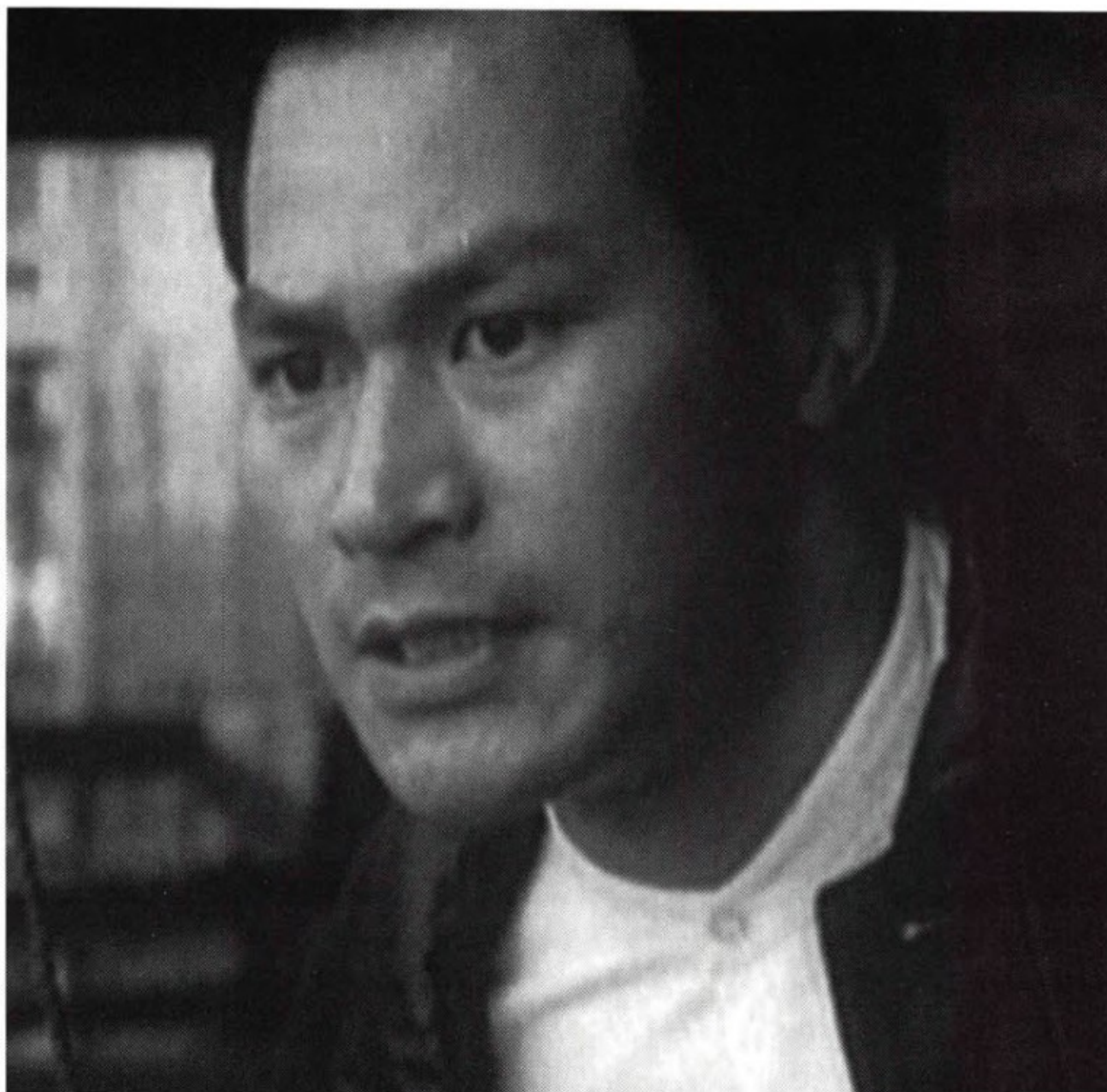
Aside from a few gritty fight sequences, there is very little here that is fresh or notable. Believe it or not, a sequence in which slimy character actor Shum Wai attempts to rape a defenseless girl was later re-used by director

A NOTE ON TIMINGS

The timings listed for the following tapes reflect only the length of the film itself, and do not include such ephemera as video company logos, FBI warnings, supplementary trailers, or MPAA ratings certificates. The only exceptions to this rule are those films in which the soundtrack is first heard while the distributor's logo is still onscreen.

KEY

+	Supplements
16:9	WS TV Adaptable
CC	Closed Captioned
D	Digital
DD	Dolby Digital
DTS	Digital Theater Systems (Audio)
DVD-0	No Region Code
DVD-1	USA, Canada
DVD-2	Europe, Japan
HF	Hi-Fi
LB	Letterboxed
MA	Multiple Audio
NSR	No Suggested Retail
OOP	Out of Print
P&S	Pan&Scan
S	Stereo
SS	Surround Sound
ST	Subtitles



Obsessed police officer Dick Wei must take down a triad ganglord no matter what the cost in the HK crime thriller CODE OF HONOR.

Billy Chan Wui-ngai in his comedy **BEGINNER'S LUCK** (1994)! Arena/Xenon's **HONG KONG CORRUPTOR** is a retitled version of Joseph Cheung Tung-cho's **RETURN ENGAGEMENT** (1990), "supplemented" by footage of Chow Yun-fat lifted from this picture. Danny Lee Sau-yin, Shing Fui-on, and Dennis Chan Kwok-san also appear.

The VHS (English dubbed) and DVD (English, Cantonese, and Mandarin, with optional English subtitles) share the same 1987 Ocean Shores transfer. The 1.85:1 frame is cropped to fullscreen and noticeably squeezed, with weak colors and contrasts, and occasional blooming whites. The sound is adequate, but the two Chinese tracks are missing a brief section of dialogue that is retained in the English version. Two bits of violence (in which a fork in

plunged through Lung's cheek, followed shortly thereafter by the steak knife amputation of the fingers on his left hand), originally toned down by HK censors, appear intact here, though Tai Seng had to finesse the Chinese audio tracks to keep everything in sync. This is particularly evident on the Mandarin dub, which features a different score than the other two versions. The disc includes an audio commentary, featuring Ric Meyers, Bobby Samuels, and Frank Djeng. They provide interesting minutiae about HK events at the time of production, the history of triads, and relevant Chinese traditions. All three oversell the movie's accomplishments, but Meyers' digressions and generalizations are fewer in number than usual here, helping to make this a focused and satisfying talk. —John Charles

JET LI THE LEGEND OF THE SWORDSMAN

Siu ngo gong woo ji Dung
Fong Bat Baai (Cantonese)
Xiao ao jiang hu zhi Dong Fang
Bu Bai (Mandarin)

"Smiling Proud Warrior:
Invincible Asia"

1992/2002, Miramax/Dimension
Home Entertainment,
HF/SS/CC, NSR, VHS
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/ST/+,
\$29.99, DVD-1, 98m 45s

SWORDSMAN II

1992, Tai Seng Video Marketing/
Mei Ah Entertainment, DD-2.0 &
5.1/MA/LB/ST/+, \$29.95,
107m 21s, DVD-0

This is Miramax's dubbed, abridged, and awkwardly retitled version of Tony Ching Siu-tung's **SWORDSMAN II**, one of the most accomplished and popular of the period fantasies that flooded HK theatres during the early 1990s. The original **SWORDSMAN** was a problematic production, a box office disappointment in relation to its immense cost. Producer Tsui Hark pressed on with a sequel nevertheless, making some fundamental changes up front; in addition to a smaller scale and budget, he replaced the entire cast, with the sole exception of Fennie Yuen Kit-ying (who returns as "Blue Phoenix"). Taking over the lead role of "Ling Wuchung" is Mainland martial arts superstar Jet Li Lianjie, who brings greater energy and presence to the part, almost entirely eclipsing one's memories of Sam Hui Koon-kit's performance (which, in all fairness to Hui, is actually a more accurate interpretation of the character, as depicted in Louis Cha's novel).

As the film opens, a new and powerful threat has appeared in the martial world: Invincible Asia (Brigitte Lin Ching-hsia).



SWORDSMAN II fans will not be happy with the way Miramax has transformed it into JET LI THE LEGEND OF THE SWORDSMAN.

Following instructions found in The Sacred Volume, the ambitious villain castrated himself and is gradually transforming into a woman, a normal side effect of this ritual, which gives the subject great supernatural powers. In league with Japanese ninjas (led by Waise Lee Chi-hung), Asia plans on having the Sun Moon Sect rule the country and has kidnapped Chief Wu (father of Highlander Ying, played this time by Rosamund Kwan Chi-lam) as the first stage in this plan. While fleeing from a platoon of army scouts, Ling encounters Asia on a beach, practicing his/her newly acquired abilities; pretending to be mute, Asia (who had crossed paths with Ling once briefly before) flirts with the swordsman, rather than killing him. Joining forces with Ying, Ling and his fellow Wah Mountain swordsmen set out to find Chief Wu (Yam Sai-kwoon), and Ling is eventually able to liberate him from one of Asia's prisons. However, Wu has changed during his incarceration and now, lusting after

domination himself, has his own plans for The Sacred Volume. After so much death and treachery, Ling would like nothing more than to leave the turmoil of the martial world behind, but events necessitate that he intervene in this power struggle one more time.

Brigitte Lin cuts a dazzling figure in one of her most memorable Yin Yang roles; the character's sexual confusion adds a wonderful, atypical undercurrent to the proceedings, catapulting the traditional lovers-on-opposing-sides story element into an entirely new dimension. Though densely plotted, this sequel is easier to comprehend than its predecessor and the visuals are consistently arresting. The action choreography in period fantasies is almost always exciting, but the combat staged here is an absolutely thrilling blend of mystical and traditional (ie. earthbound) battle, and features some of the most fluid, impressive wirework you will ever see. **SWORDSMAN II**'s success prompted Tsui to undertake **THE EAST IS RED** (1993), an even

more flamboyant but, sadly, far less satisfying continuation of Invincible Asia's saga. Michelle Lee Kar-yan (aka Michelle Reis), Lau Shun, Candice Yu On-on, and Chin Kar-lok also appear.

Miramax has developed a bad reputation for their mishandling of many HK imports and **JET LI THE LEGEND OF THE SWORDSMAN** (which carries this awkward moniker onscreen) will do nothing to turn the tide. On the one hand, Miramax deserve a measure of credit for retaining the vast majority of **SWORDSMAN II**'s original score and foley tracks, but they sound so flat next to the new revoicing that the mix is thrown off-balance, causing the combat sequences to suffer considerably. Jack Maeby's English script dumbs-down the original dialogue considerably (even the hero's name is simplified from Ling Wu-chung to Ling Wei) and often drops details that added to the original cut's character—like the fighters yelling their martial arts stance, just prior

to attack. While none of the stars did their own looping in the Cantonese version, the American voiceover artists' line readings are rarely suitable and emphasize just how inane the new dialogue often is. The incompetence of the ADR reaches its peak at 57:48, when dialogue being spoken by Chief Wu has accidentally been dropped from the mix, making it seem like a supporting player's words are coming out of Wu's mouth! Approximately 9m has been cut from this release, including some gore. When Chief Wu uses the "Essence Absorbing Stance" against Invincible Asia later on, all shots of blood cascading from her body have been removed. (This sequence is also missing one shot in the HK version and appears uncut only in the 112m Taiwanese edition.) Some more spurting blood and a head rolling down some stairs have also been excised to ensure an "R" rating.

Miramax's pan&scan VHS transfer is noticeably cramped, but their anamorphically enhanced 1.84:1 DVD offers a fairly good visual presentation. The source material contains scratches and speckles, but colors are attractive and contrast levels are generally good. Low-light sequences are sometimes flat and grainy, but this is a limitation of the original photography. The audio is mildly stereophonic but uninvolved and not really worth amplifying. The closed captioning is detailed (though Ling Wei is always referred to as Ling Wu) and the DVD includes a trailer for Martin Scorsese's forthcoming **GANGS OF NEW YORK** and American video promo spots for **THE ACCIDENTAL SPY**, **THE MASTER**, **THE LEGEND 2** (aka **FONG SAI YUK 2**), and **IRON MONKEY**. There is a smooth layer change at 45:34.

Mei Ah's single layer DVD (sub-distributed domestically by Tai Seng) has no time coding, a lesser transfer, and more source material damage. Regardless, it remains far preferable, in light of Miramax's tampering. Digital instability is frequently evident in the 1.78 presentation, but the 5.1 remix on the Cantonese and Mandarin tracks features more pronounced stereo effects and atmosphere than Miramax's 2.0 track. The original monaural versions are also available in 2.0. Extras consist of a 2m 29s music video showcasing a Mandarin song crooned by Rosamund Kwan's character (this bit is truncated and presented *sans* vocals in the Miramax release) and a trailer for the Chow Yun-fat film **TREASURE HUNT** (1994), hidden in the "Best Buy" section. Subtitles are available in English, Traditional & Simplified Chinese, Korean, Malaysian, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Thai. As of this writing, Tai Seng still offers the Chinese versions on VHS for \$19.98 and they feature far more literate English subtitles than those found on the DVD. —John Charles

LEMONADE JOE

*Limonadovy Joe aneb
Konska Opera*

"Lemonade Joe, or Horse Opera"
1964, Facets Video, HF/LB/ST,
\$29.95, 95m 12s, VHS

A dead-on parody of the Hollywood Western, **LEMONADE JOE** is a Czech Western—yes, a Czech Western!—and an example of the bold, inventive spirit of the film movement known as the Czech New Wave, sometimes referred to as the Czech Golden Age of cinema. Film historians generally date the period of the Czech New Wave from 1961 (with feminist Vera Chytilova's **CEILING**, 1961) to August 1968,

when the movement was ended by the artistic repression following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Several of its leading filmmakers, among them Milos Forman (**THE FIREMAN'S BALL**, 1967) and Forman's scenarist, Ivan Passer (**CUTTER'S WAY**, 1981), subsequently left Czechoslovakia to make films in the United States. The vitality and inventiveness of the films of this period is remarkable, acknowledged by the many titles currently available on home video. These include several Criterion DVDs: Milos Forman's **THE FIREMAN'S BALL** and **LOVES OF A BLONDE** (1965), Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos's **THE SHOP ON MAIN STREET** (1965), and Jirí Menzel's **CLOSELY WATCHED TRAINS** (1966). Facets Video is also to be lauded for its commitment to making films from this period available on home video in their series, "Czech New Wave," of which **LEMONADE JOE** is a delightful example.

LEMONADE JOE is set in Stetson City, Arizona in 1885, a wind-swept desert town located near Fatamorgana Valley. Following a **DODGE CITY**-like brawl at the local watering-hole, the Trigger Whiskey Saloon, the hard-drinking patrons become entranced by the singing of beer-guzzling Tornado Lou (Kveta Fialová), otherwise known as the "Arizona Goldfinch." Tornado Lou is the heartthrob of the Trigger Whiskey's owner, Doug Badman (Rudolf Deyl), whose sidekick is the foul and nasty, fiddle-chomping "Old Pistol" (Karel Effa). The entertainment is interrupted when the local temperance crusader, Winnifred Goodman (played by one-time **PLAYBOY** cover girl Olga Schoberova), enters the saloon handing out leaflets and urging the men to give up liquor ("Give up drink and you'll be quicker on the trigger,"



Karel Fiala puts the crush on main squeeze Tornado Lou (Kveta Fialová) in the bizarre Czech Western, LEMONADE JOE.

she tells one lecherous admirer). Winnifred earns the ire of "Old Pistol" when she empties out his skull-shaped tankard of whiskey (which is strong enough to eat a hole through the floor). She is rescued by the white-haired, white-hatted, tee-totaling Lemonade Joe (Karel Fiala), the local Kolaloka lemonade salesman and all-around good guy. Following Lemonade Joe's dressing down (literally) of "Old Pistol," Joe offers Winnifred the rest of his bottle of Kolaloka lemonade, which endears him to her heart. Pledging her love for Joe at her mother's grave, Winnifred swears "To him alone, dear Mother, I will entrust the treasure of my maidenhood." Her romance with Joe seems assured until the unexpected return of Doug Badman's long-lost brother, the diabolical Hogo Fogo ("I'll rub off your flower, my little peach"), who, love-struck, will stop at nothing to steal Winnifred away from Lemonade Joe.

Funny, witty and filled with remarkably frank (for its time) sexual innuendo, **LEMONADE JOE** is a wonderfully inventive parody of Hollywood Westerns, superbly directed by veteran Oldrich Lipsky. Not only is it a parody of films such as **DODGE CITY** (1939) as well as Roy Rogers Westerns (the characters break out into song at every opportunity), but also draws inspiration from the great Warner Bros. cartoons—"Old Pistol" eating a musician's fiddle to silence his playing, background buildings with names such as "Acme Tool Company," etc. It also relies on leftover devices from silent cinema, such as undercranking certain scenes (eg., fistfights and barroom brawls) and tinting daytime scenes a sepia and nighttime scenes blue. The film is as vital and lively now as it would have been almost 40 years ago, lending it a "timeless" appeal.

Slightly letterboxed at 1.50:1, the source for the transfer was a positive print showing some

speckling and an occasional scratch, especially at reel changes, but is otherwise quite good. The picture is fine, if slightly soft, with good contrasts and, as indicated earlier, is tinted B&W, with tart lemon-yellow subtitles. The box incorrectly lists a running time of 87m. —Rebecca & Sam Umland

THE PHANTOM

1931, Sinister Cinema, HF, \$15pp, 61m 59s, VHS

THE THIRTEENTH GUEST

1932, Sinister Cinema, HF, \$15pp, 68m 27s, VHS

THE INTRUDER

1933, Sinister Cinema, HF, \$15pp, 54m 40s, VHS

A SHOT IN THE DARK

1935, Sinister Cinema, HF, \$15pp, 68m 58s, VHS

Sinister Cinema recently retired dozens of titles from its catalogue, but these four "forgotten horrors"

are still available. B-Western hero Guinn Williams is the brawny star of **THE PHANTOM**. Not to be confused with Simon Wincer's 1996 adaptation of the Lee Falk comic strip (which starred Billy Zane as "the ghost who walks"), this 1931 old-dark-houser was written and directed by Alvin J. Neitz (aka "Allan James"). An escaped killer known as "The Phantom" passes a note to affluent district attorney Hampton (Wilford Lucas), demanding to be received in the prosecutor's study after midnight. Evading Detective Pat Collins (**MURDER IN THE MUSEUM**'s Tom O'Brien) and several police bodyguards to gain entry into the mansion, Dick Mallory (Williams) confronts Hampton in his study. Introducing himself as a newsman assigned to the story by the same paper for which Hampton's daughter Ruth (Pathé serial queen Allene Ray) works as a society reporter, Dick (secretly engaged to Ruth but too poor and proud to announce their "matrimonial bid'ness") hopes that catching the Phantom will enable him to "make good" and earn the blessing of his prospective father-in-law. When The Phantom's arrival through a sliding panel frightens jittery chambermaid Lucy (Violet Knights), Dick and Ruth give chase to the grounds of a nearby sanitarium. Pretending to be the victims of an accident, the amateur sleuths run afoul of the reclusive Dr. Weldon (William Gould), a mad scientist who sees in Ruth "a marvelous subject" for brain transplantation!

Patterned after **THE CAT AND THE CANARY** (1927) and both the silent **THE BAT** (1927) and its sound remake, **THE BAT WHISPERS** (1930), **THE PHANTOM** tries to mimic the frenzied stage business of those earlier hits, but has none of

their lunatic charm. Guinn "Big Boy" Williams is an agreeable leading man, but the secondary characters are annoying in the extreme (low marks go to Violet Knights' stridulous Lucy and William Jackie's Swedish screwball, who asks every character if they've heard the story of "Yack and Yill") when not all but invisible. Wilfred Lucas' principled politico fades from the action well before the finish and leading lady Allene Ray spends most of her screen time feigning unconsciousness; worst of all, the film's villain is a major non-entity and the mystery's last minute explanation (from a character no one has ever seen before) is a real letdown. Sheldon Lewis, star of Louis B. Mayer's 1920 version of **DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE**, turns up as a leering **CAT AND THE CANARY**-style hunchback, hinting at a subplot that (surprise) goes nowhere—making the real villain of this piece writer-director Alvin Neitz, who fails to keep the business on a consistently professional level. Several scenes unroll awkwardly, with the actors muffing their cues or stepping on one another's lines, and the mad Dr. Weldon's surname is alternatively pronounced by the actors as "Weldron" and "Waldron."

George E. Turner and Michael H. Price's **FORGOTTEN HORRORS: THE DEFINITIVE VERSION** cites a 70m running time for **THE PHANTOM**, but Sinister Cinema's print lasts an extremely slow-moving 61m. (The film is so badly conceived and constructed that it's difficult to tell if anything is missing.) Taken from a 16mm source print, the image is in characteristically degraded condition for a film of this vintage, with fair-to-poor contrasts, but remains watchable. The sound is subject to occasional drop-outs.

A more successful old dark house redux is **THE THIRTEENTH GUEST**, produced for Monogram by Max Hoffman and directed by Albert Ray. Sinister's transfer of this 1932 whodunit has been culled from a print of the British release, re-titled **LADY BEWARE** (not to be confused with the 1987 Diane Lane film of the same name). When the corpse of 21-year-old Marie Morgan is found in her family's abandoned Long Island mansion, police captain Ryan (J. Farrell Mac Donald) calls in private dick Phil Winston (Lyle Talbot) to crack the case. With the conclusion that the victim was electrocuted, Winston learns that the mansion's power was restored by order of family lawyer, Barksdale (Robert Klein). When prime suspect Barksdale is also fatally fried and a young woman (Ginger Rogers) turns up claiming to be the real Marie Morgan, Winston gathers her surviving relations and learns of a fateful banquet held at the Morgan mansion 13 years earlier. On that night, Marie's father died suddenly, without divulging the beneficiary of his will, but indicating that his estate would go to the one invitee who failed to show—"the thirteenth guest." When Marie's uncle Wayne is discovered in the study clutching a telephone receiver in his dead hand, Winston deduces how the killer claims his victims—and from where. With the dead Marie proven to be a surgically-altered imposter and the real Marie summoned to the mansion by persons unknown, Winston races to catch her before the killer can throw the lethal switch.

Frances Hyland and Arthur Hoerl adapted **THE THIRTEENTH GUEST** with author Armitage Trail (who penned the source novel for Howard Hawks' **SCARFACE**); its literary pedigree explains why the film feels more well-rounded, if



Photo from FORGOTTEN HORRORS, Midnight Marquee Press.

*Ginger Rogers and Lyle Talbot exchange meaningful glances in **THE THIRTEENTH GUEST**.*

perhaps a bit over-plotted for its brief running time. Whatever its shortcomings, the film is tartly directed by Albert Ray, well-photographed by Harry Neumann and Tom Galligan, and charmingly played by leads Rogers (at the time a free agent floating from studio to studio) and Talbot (later an associate of Ed Wood, Jr., with roles in **GLEN OR GLENDA**, **JAIL BAIT** and **PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE**). Equally fun are J. Farrell MacDonald (the grouchy homeowner whose tree James Stewart scrapes in **IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE**) as a gruff copper who calls his men "sweetheart" and "dearie," and comic actor Paul Hurst (**ISLAND OF LOST SOULS**), as a bumbling flatfoot who winds up in bed (offscreen, natch) with Marie's nymphomaniac cousin ("Well, you said to *tail* her"). The dialogue,

attributed to Armitage Trail, is ripe and playful ("Your soul must look like the inside of a vinegar bottle") and art director Gene Hornbostel kits out the Morgan mansion with a creepy collection of cobwebs and crawling things. The writers have fun ribbing "the upper crust" ("Aw, go read your ticker") and imply a homosexual relationship between Marie's brother Bud (James C. Eagles) and his "boyfriend" Thor (Eddie Phillips).

THE THIRTEENTH GUEST is the best-looking title in this collection of forgotten horrors, with only the expected blemishes. There are instances of audio hiss and sound dropout, plus occasional gatefloat, but these demerits are never ruinous to the presentation. The feature is preceded by trailers for **RIP ROARING RILEY** [reviewed VW 67:20],

THE FIGHTING MARINES and **MURDER BY INVITATION** [VW 60:20]. As a surprise, Sinister has also added as a bonus the film's original title sequence (46s) and closing card (4s). **THE THIRTEENTH GUEST** is also offered by Sinister on DVD-R for the same price as the tape (\$12.95 plus \$2.05 shipping and handling).

Director Albert Ray, scenarist Frances Hyland, cinematographers Harry Neumann (who later shot Roger Corman's **THE WASP WOMAN**) and Tom Galligan, and art director Gene Hornbostel reteamed with producer Max Hoffmann the same year for the desert island whodunit **THE INTRUDER**, released through Hoffmann's independent Allied Pictures Corporation. (The team reunited with Ginger Rogers and Lyle Talbot the following year,

for Allied's **A SHRIEK IN THE NIGHT**.) Not to be confused with the similarly-titled 1962 exploitation film (aka **I HATE YOUR GUTS!**) produced by Corman or the 1988 supermarket slasher (aka **NIGHT CREW: THE FINAL CUT**) directed by Scott Spiegel, **THE INTRUDER** is distinguished by a wacky appearance by Russian émigré turned Hollywood exotic Mischa Auer (the first to die in René Clair's **AND THEN THERE WERE NONE**). When a passenger aboard the S.S. Intruder is hacked to death with a fireman's axe, detective Samson (William Davidson) assembles the suspects in the victim's stateroom. Announcing that he had been trailing the late "Mr. Gardner" on suspicion of being a jewel thief, Samson narrows his suspects down to a shifty valet (Sidney Bracy) and Jack Brandt (Monte Blue), who knew the dead man and had threatened to "break his head in." Samson's sleuthing is sidetracked when the Intruder hits a derelict ship, forcing everyone into lifeboats. Washing ashore on an uncharted atoll, the survivors—who also include Captain Rush (**LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**'s Allen Cavan), the moneyed Mr. Wayne (Wilford Lawson), his daughter Connie (Lila Lee) and son Reggie (Arthur Houseman), a bottle blonde named Daisy (Gwen Lee) and Cramer (**NARCOTIC**'s Harry Cording), a "ratty looking fellow" from Third Class—await rescue and keep guard against a raving wildman (Auer, looking like Johnny Legend) and a predatory gorilla whose nocturnal shrieks sound like the wailing of "a soul in purgatory."

Not nearly as classy or as fun as **THE THIRTEENTH GUEST**, **THE INTRUDER** is nonetheless fairly witty (when the gorilla's jungle call is first heard, Daisy cracks "It's Tarzan, giving us the

key to the city") and well-acted by a spirited troupe. Part Cherokee, Monte Blue got his start in film as a stunt man before scoring a bit part in **BIRTH OF A NATION** and appearing in larger roles in several films by D.W. Griffith, including **INTOLERANCE** and **ORPHANS OF THE STORM**; Blue is an affable hero in the collegiate mode, frequently upstaged by the seventh-billed Auer (whose character keeps company with two skeletons, "Joe" and "Mary"), Arthur Houseman (this professional movie "drunk" was an offscreen teetotaler) and the tough-talking Gwen Lee (real name, Gwendolyn La Pinski). An undercurrent of class conflict keeps **THE INTRUDER**'s mid-section lively, with the blue-blooded Connie taking umbrage at her family name being associated with murder ("We don't kill people"); trying to shift blame onto her lower class companions, the naïve Connie has her hash settled by bad girl Daisy, whose lot in life (it is inferred, through

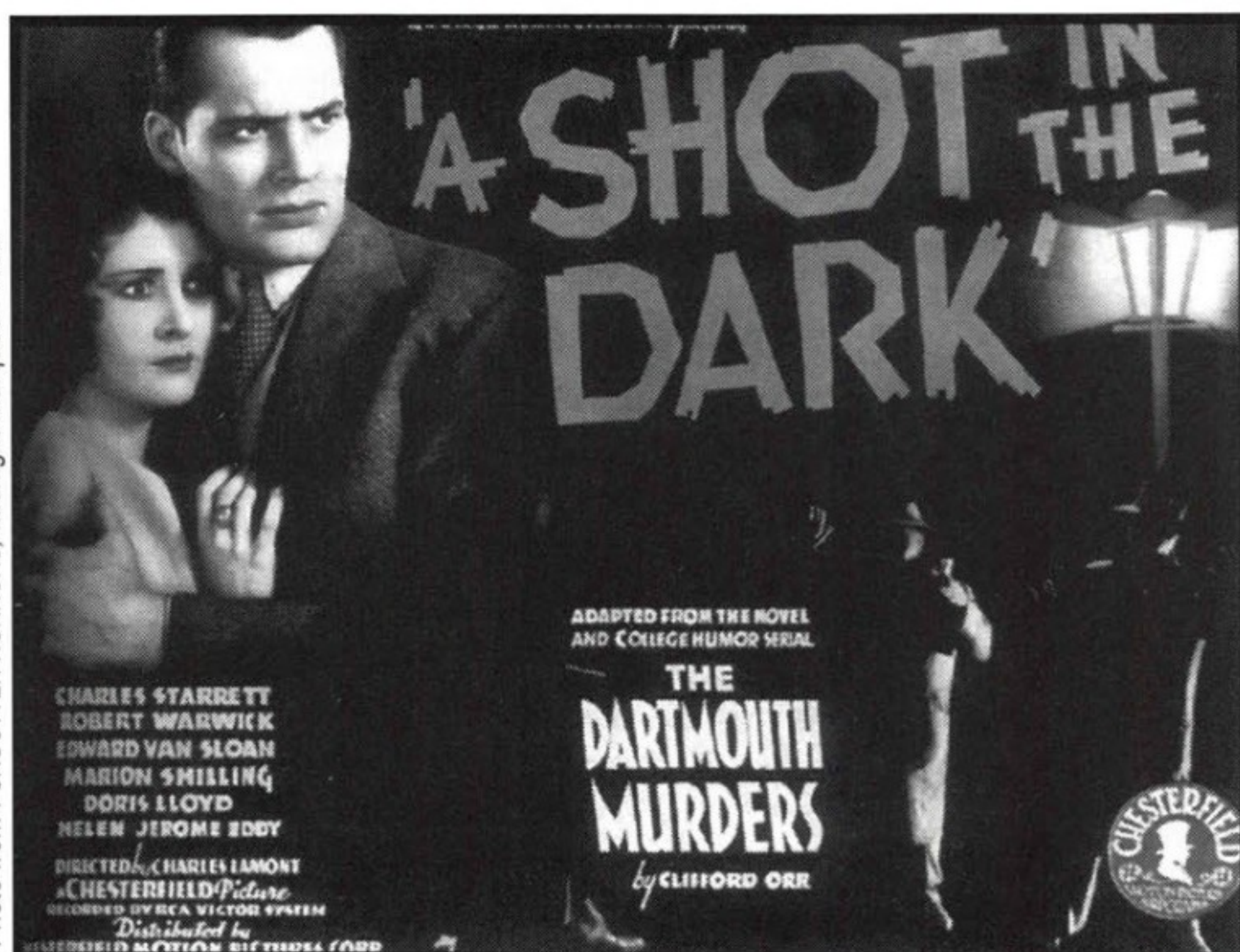
various *double entendres*) has been considerably less privileged. The relationship of the mothering Connie to her dissolute brother may have been inspired by the Fay Wray-Robert Armstrong sibling act in **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**, which also began with a shipwreck (and featured William Davidson, in a smaller role) and was released three months before **THE INTRUDER**, in September 1932.

Sinister's transfer (from a 16mm positive source) of **THE INTRUDER** is troubled by poor sound, with a pervasive degree of hum and hiss that grows worse after the 30m mark; most drastically affected is the scene in which Connie and Daisy make friends while taking shelter overnight in a cave. The image is slightly zoomed, with the actors' heads frequently cropped off at the crown. The tape's running time of just under 55m is a full reel off a listed running time of 66m, but there is no obvious missing material.

Monte Blue and Arthur Houseman star in the shipboard whodunit, **THE INTRUDER**.



Photo from FORGOTTEN HORRORS, Midnight Marquee Press.



Richard Thorpe's collegiate mystery **MURDER ON THE CAMPUS** (1934) was sufficiently profitable for Chesterfield Motion Pictures to bankroll an immediate follow-up, **A SHOT IN THE DARK**, reuniting stars Charles Starrett and Edward Van Sloan. Adapted from Clifford Orr's novel **THE DARTMOUTH MURDERS**, **A SHOT IN THE DARK** (not to be confused with Blake Edwards' 1964 sequel to **THE PINK PANTHER**) irises out on the campus of New England's Cornwall College, where "moody and strange" senior Byron Coates (James Bush) is found hanged from his dormitory window. In town for the Fall House Party, "mighty clever" lawyer Joseph Harris (Robert Warwick), whose son Ken (Starrett) was the dead boys roommate, aids in the official inquiry. With the cause of death attributed not to hanging but from a needle driven into the brain, the elder Harris reaches out to the boy's friends. Before Sam Anderson (Ralph Brooks) can identify the last person to see Byron alive, he too is murdered in the same fashion during a

school assembly. Given free rein to investigate by Professor Bostwick (Van Sloan, given too little to do), Harris consults with a country sheriff (Robert McKenzie) whose hardware sideline prompts him to suggest compressed air as a means of dispensing the lethal needles. Unearthing the murder weapon, an air pistol used for killing cattle, Harris and son set about untangling the skein of secrets and lies leading to murder in a place "where youth and high ideals are supposed to prevail."

Whenever a novel is compressed into a screenplay running scarcely over an hour, the results will feel a bit breathless. Although adapting scenarist Charles Belden (whose play "The Wax Museum" inspired Warner's **MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM** and its 3D remake, **HOUSE OF WAX**) occasionally trips over his own attempts to be comprehensive, **A SHOT IN THE DARK** succeeds on the strength of its performances and the novelty of its *raison d'être*. Robert Warwick (a Paris-trained opera singer turned

Broadway star) was no stranger to sleuthing, having appeared in 1929 as "scientific detective" Craig Kennedy in Artlass Pictures' **UNMASKED**; with his haughty mien and impeccable grammar, Warwick is not an immediately likable amateur gumshoe, however self-deprecating ("I've never smoked opium or played the violin"). Softening Warwick's edge is the strapping Charles Starrett, a real-life Dartmouth man and the barechested juvenile of MGM's **THE MASK OF FU MANCHU** (1932); Starrett would later achieve lasting fame as "the Durango Kid" in a number of Columbia Westerns. Midway through **A SHOT IN THE DARK**, Edward Van Sloan (between **DRACULA** and **DRACULA'S DAUGHTER**, on which Charles Belden worked as an uncredited contributing writer) drops out of the story (only to return within seconds of the climax), but Eddie Tamblyn (father of Russ) and John Davidson (**THE DEVIL BAT**) are fun in minor roles. Charles Lamont (a former director for Mack Sennett, who later helmed some of Abbott & Costello's lesser vehicles) keeps the convoluted doings interesting, while Chesterfield's resident cameraman M.A. Anderson (who had shot **MURDER ON THE CAMPUS**) and in-house art director Edward Jewell (who later designed the expressionistic **STRANGLER OF THE SWAMP** and Edgar Ulmer's **DETOUR** for PRC) keep the proceedings consistently eye-catching, especially with the use of menacing shadows.

Unfortunately, **A SHOT IN THE DARK** looks strictly third generation from start to finish, with smudgy contrasts and whites that bloom so hot as to obscure facial details in long shots. There are instances of vertical creasing and gatefloat, as



Vincent Spano and Mädchen Amick shed some light on New York's vermin problem in Renfield's favorite film of 2001, *THE RATS*.

well as intermittent diamond-shape punctures that bedevil the image near reel changes. Sounds drops are also problematic, but not altogether ruinous. Sinister's tape clocks in, almost to the second, at the listed run time of 69m. —Richard Harland Smith

THE RATS

aka **THE COLONY**

2001, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, HF/CC, \$104.99 (priced for rental), 93m 44s, VHS

With an exploitation movie titled **THE RATS**, the temptation is huge to begin our account of this made-for-TV item with a mocking comparison to a chunk of Wisconsin's famous product—but, in this case, that would be a disservice. No, it isn't art, it doesn't even transcend its exploitation template (as does, say, **THE GHOSTS OF SPOON RIVER**); **THE RATS** is simply undemanding fare that delivers its exploitation goods surprisingly well. It's reasonably smart, but has no pretensions or ambitions beyond that, such as the slightly more subversive approach that

John Sayles brought to his riffs on the genre, **PIRANHA** (1978) and **ALLIGATOR** (1980).

THE RATS finds a rogue colony of laboratory-mutated rats mounting escalating attacks on midtown Manhattan. The first attack occurs in the dressing room of Garson's, an upscale department store, where a cute young thing strips to her panties to try on a blouse and gets nipped on the finger. Shortly afterward, a building super is devoured by a small army of rodents which, in a memorable image, cascade down the steps to his living quarters. Presumably, the brief shots of bared breasts and a rat ripping off and scurrying away with an ear were not part of the broadcast version. After the woman lands in ICU in a coma, Garson's manager Susan Costello (*TWIN PEAKS*' Mädchen Amick) summons Jack Carver (Vincent Spano), a specialist in rat extermination.

Like most critters-on-the-loose films, **THE RATS** (incredibly, the *sixth* film to carry this title, with or without the "THE," since 1997!) follows the outline

of **JAWS** (1975) rather than the film that initially prompted the sub-genre, **THE BIRDS** (1963). Here, predictably, we have a store manager who doesn't want to deal with the problem, beyond setting traps, since the rats are entering the store from outside, which makes them a *government* problem (she suggests the National Guard be summoned). The Health Department wants to delay acting until after several cash-generating conventions have departed the city, even though hundreds of the furry vermin have attacked children in a city pool. With no official help forthcoming, Jack and Susan decide to deal with the problem on their own.

Since **THE RATS** is a TV movie, the primary *raison d'être* of such films—victims dispatched in spectacularly gruesome fashion—is kept to a minimum, but still earns an R rating. A subway employee joins the super as the film's only other onscreen fatality (we never learn the fate of the comatose young woman and, curiously, the super's absence

is never noticed!). Other scenes merely place people in peril, but here the film truly realizes its cheese quotient by placing Costello's daughter Amy (Daveigh Chase) in jeopardy not once, not twice, but three times. It turns out Amy holds the key to the attacks, so there is a plot rationale, but threatening a child repeatedly is really straining for the Lowest Common Denominator. The attack scenes are not only practically bloodless, they're not terribly exciting. Long shots of swarming CGI rats mingle with close-ups of real ones, isolated from the human performers like some Bert I. Gordon effect, and shots of actors interacting with puppets; even rapid-fire editing can't juice-up such an approach, since these disparate shots stubbornly refuse to cohere or build into potent sequences. The CGI is too obvious to communicate a sense of real contact, much less danger, and the puppets are equally unconvincing since their fur is too, well, ratty to be believable.

Director John Lafia is more successful at building suspense in scenes where Jack, his assistant Ty (Shawn Michael Howard) and Susan go exploring for the rat colony. Setting these in the bowels of the city and unused areas of the department store is an inspired touch, since the latter especially is a unique locale in films. As the characters wander through endless passageways and unidentified areas, creating a hopelessly confused geography, the sequences build some of the same dread Lovecraft generated in his fiction when his protagonists explored labyrinthine ancient cities and underground complexes. The visual look may owe more than a little to THE X-FILES (silhouetted, backlit figures waving flashlights) but

they are well-handled. Frank Deasy's script is peppered with throwaway humor throughout, mostly relating to Jack's penchant for rat-factoids ("You're never more than five feet from a rat in New York; there are nine rats for every person"), some of which—such as the information that rats are permanently incontinent—may be way too much. Spano and Amick's repartée may not reach Nick & Nora Charles levels, but they give some dimension to characters that are not otherwise very fleshed-out. Spano especially enlivens the film with a relaxed affability, in a role that could easily have been given an *echt*-Schwarzenegger spin; it falls to Amick as the wrapped-too-tight professional woman to adopt that persona. The inversion of roles is a nifty touch and Spano's bemused reactions as Amick becomes eager to kick rat butt are small gems of comic underplaying.

Fox's transfer is a bit hazy, with occasionally overstrong color, but most will find the image quality of the VHS superior to the results of recording it off the air. Our screener copy offered no stats for the audio, which is two-channel but doesn't sound like stereo. Even so, the sound quality is reasonably bold and crisp, making the most of Elia Cmiral's tacky, pulsing synthesizer score. Also available on VHS in a Spanish language version, and on DVD in a widescreen transfer with no extras. —Harry Long

WAKING LIFE

2001, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, HF/SS/CC, \$107.99 (Priced for rental), 100m 9s, VHS

Richard Linklater's **WAKING LIFE** appeared in theaters

one month after the events of September 11, receiving generally strong attention before fading away to be reincarnated on home video. Formally, the film represents a bold experiment in filmmaking: it was first shot on digital video and then transformed by some 30 computer animators into an animated film in a manner that goes far beyond rotoscoping. The "painting" and digital manipulation of live video footage is largely the brainchild of Austin-based computer animator Bob Sabiston, who went to work after Linklater had shot and edited the DV footage. Whether **WAKING LIFE** will initiate a new trend in animated features, or represents an interesting one-shot, remains to be seen. In any case, it is an engaging art house film about articulate, if sometimes, garrulous characters who are striving to find meaning in their lives.

The film's unnamed protagonist (**DAZED AND CONFUSED**'s Wiley Wiggins), returns to his home town and finds his quotidian life unaccountably strange. He is offered a ride by a man driving a car that resembles a boat. Dropped off at an intersection, Wiley find a note lying in the middle of the street that reads, "Look to your right." Just as he turns, he sees a car that, a moment later, slams into him. Emerging from his coma, he cannot shake the nagging suspicion that life is but a dream—or is he still in a coma? He drifts from one person and place to another (reminiscent of Linklater's first movie, **SLACKER**), meeting artists, writers, teachers, and philosophers, all of whom expound on their ideas and theories about life: the lesson of existentialism, the reasons for violence, for civil

disobedience, about how modern life is a spectacle, and even theories about the cinema. Seeking a way to determine whether he is awake or asleep—and if, philosophically speaking, it is possible to determine the difference at all—Wiley eventually meets a character (played by Linklater himself) who suggests to Wiley that perhaps he is dead. If one's consciousness continues on after death, how can he know?

Although the dialogue is largely philosophical, one never loses track of the core narrative. Some of the characters are played by recognizable actors, such as Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy (who appeared in Linklater's **BEFORE SUNRISE**), while others are actual artists and writers from Austin, Texas—Linklater's home town; some, such as Robert C. Solomon and Louis Mackey, are teachers at the University of Texas. There is even an appearance by eccentric New York City tour guide Speed Levitch (**THE CRUISE**). All of the participants discuss a wide range of ideas and theories, ranging from Guy Debord to André Bazin to Nietzsche to Giacometti to—perhaps most importantly, given that the director himself cites him at length—the late science fiction novelist Philip K. Dick, a gnostic mystic whose thought informs **WAKING LIFE** in a number of fundamental ways. Among them are the film's derealization (the refusal to accept the everyday world as real) and the notion of a demiurge who manufactures an endless array of spurious worlds—this latter perhaps a comment on the filmmaker's own digital manipulation of reality. (There is also a sly, self-reflective moment by the filmmakers that occurs while



*Animated performances abound in Richard Linklater's visionary and philosophical new film, **WAKING LIFE**.*

Wiley is channel surfing, when he stops on the image of Steven Soderbergh telling an anecdote about Billy Wilder and Louis Malle. When Wilder was told by Malle that he had just completed a \$2,000,000 film exploring philosophical ideas, Wilder replied that he, Malle, had just lost \$2,000,000.) Of course, one possible objection to the film is that its ideas and theories consist of the vulgar paraphrase of issues raised in an undergraduate philosophy class. Perhaps, but in any case, ideas are—for good or ill—frequently transmitted by cliché and paraphrase, so this isn't an objection that applies to this film alone. Moreover, **WAKING LIFE**'s ideas cannot be divorced from its striking visual style; indeed, form and content seem inter-related. However, a theme that is left curiously unexplored, that receives only two brief allusions throughout and is never pursued, is a person's sexual life while in the dream state. This received an R rating "For language and some violent images," but in

sexual terms the film is remarkably chaste.

Our VHS screener copy presented the film fullframe in a crisp and colorful transfer, with a solid but unelaborate soundtrack mostly confined to the front channels. The full-framing is acceptable, although TCF Home Entertainment has also issued the film on DVD (\$29.98) with the 16:9 anamorphic widescreen option. Without question, the DVD medium would be preferable in this instance, especially as the disc is reportedly loaded with supplements, including two separate audio commentaries—one with director Richard Linklater and others, the other with over 25 of the film's animators. It also includes deleted animated scenes, selected live action digital video footage, short films by animator Bob Sabiston, a short feature on the making of the film, a software tutorial by Sabiston, and many other features. Artwork from the film is available at www.wakinglifeart.com. —Rebecca & Sam Umland



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The Film Bulletin Reviews, 1969-1974

THE LAUGHING WOMAN

Imprisoned girl inspires sadist to go straight in Italian sex bondage import. Offers enough titillation and melodrama to satisfy the less demanding sexploitation audiences. Rating: X.

THE LAUGHING WOMAN opens with a prostitute rubbing salve on her whip-marked legs, but things never get much more sadistic than that in this chronicle of female submission and degradation from Radley Metzger's Audubon Films. However, the mildly perverse proceedings are probably just exotic and erotic enough to satisfy the general voyeur audience, though some will find the Italian-made import more promise than fulfillment. On the basis of its self-applied X allure, **THE LAUGHING WOMAN** should prove a fairly good attraction for urban sex houses and drive-ins; however, with Audubon currently on an arty-to-explicit title-changing binge (**BLACK ON WHITE** to **THE ARTFUL PENETRATION**, **HIDE AND SEEK** to **THE LICKERISH QUARTET**), this one could certainly use a more enticing tag than it has. Writer-director Piero Schivazappa contributes a few amusing touches, such as a radio astrology program called "Sex Aberrations and the Stars"—"Cancer highlights necrophilia today," etc.—and the film is mounted in the usual pseudo-classy decor and photographic style the public has come to expect of Metzger presentations. Philippe Leroy, who has seen better days and vehicles, is cast as a wealthy philanthropist who is secretly a sadist, and kidnaps shapely, bookish employee Dagmar Lassander. He chains her in his gimmicked-up electronic torture chamber because this makes

her look "feminine". She does look a lot less bookish as she cries, bereft of most of her clothes, "You're mad!" "No, my dear," he deadpans, "it's not me that's mad—it's you! And all other women!" He is upset because women are plotting to procreate scientifically without men. Plenty of dubbed-in moans, whimpers and groans issue forth from Miss Lassander as Leroy forces her to make love to a lifelike rubber dummy of himself, tapes her mouth shut and eats in front of her, squirts her with a fire hose, chains her to a stone block and cuts her hair. If there were any headier diversions in the original version (20m longer), they are notably absent from this one. "You fiend!" she periodically gasps. "You're sick!" But to no avail. She tries suicide, but he saves her and, mellowing, falls in love with her, running across hillsides dotted with out-of-focus yellow flowers. He confides he's been abnormal ever since he found out at age 13 that female scorpions eat the male at the moment of sexual climax. They go places together and do things; at one point, out for dinner, she masturbates him from under the table with her foot. Finally she seduces him in a swimming pool to the accompaniment of blaring Italian Western music, and just at the moment of truth, he has a coronary. It turns out she knew he had a weak heart and strung him along as part of her own fanatical hatred of the opposite sex. She pastes his picture in her scrapbook along with other victims. She doesn't laugh, though, not once.

Femina Ridens. 1969. Audubon Film (A Dear Cinematografica Production). Moviela Color. 90 minutes. Philippe Leroy, Dagmar Lassander, Lorenza Guerrieri. Produced by Giuseppe Zaccariello. Directed by Piero Schivazappa.



Dagmar Lassander does a memorable cha-cha to a Stelvio Cipriani track in *THE LAUGHING WOMAN*, also known as *THE FRIGHTENED WOMAN*.

We reviewed this film under its alternate title **THE FRIGHTENED WOMAN** in VW 49:17, where we compared the domestic First Run Features VHS release to the Jezebel Video VHS release from the UK. The latter is longer (by 2m 6s, still not the 20m mentioned by Joe) and also much better-looking but slightly cut by the BBFC. Since our review appeared, First Run Features has released **THE FRIGHTENED WOMAN** on DVD, utilizing a new 1.85:1 transfer. We have not seen this version but it reportedly does not represent much of an improvement over the tape. The movie features one of the great Euro lounge scores of the '60s, composed by Stelvio Cipriani.

THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE

Well done haunted house chiller offers plenty for the shiver-and-shock fans. A fitting swan song for [AIP co-founder] Jim Nicholson, this could roll up good grosses in general, ballyhoo, drive-in markets if Fox gives it an appropriately strong sell. Rating: PG.

"This house... it knows we're here!" Of such ominous dialogue are classic style horror pictures

made and **THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE**, while no classic, is spookily amusing, sometimes scary stuff with plenty of mass appeal for summer playdates. In fact, this maiden effort from the late James Nicholson's Academy Pictures is slick and entertaining enough to register as one of the season's better attractions, if 20th Century-Fox capitalizes on its considerable ballyhoo potential. A surefire premise and some artfully managed atmospherics characterize the well-paced British-made chiller, which includes several sudden-shock moments to startle the fans and boasts a compact screenplay by Richard Matheson and stylish direction by John Hough. The only drawback is the disappointing ending, a letdown that reveals some seemingly tantalizing plot elements as mere loose ends. The small cast is a good one and Alan Hume's camerawork is long on weird angles and distorting lenses. Three psychic experts—physicist Clive Revill and mediums Pamela Franklin and Roddy McDowall—are hired by wealthy Roland Culver



Pamela Franklin, possessed by the terminally short Michael Gough, startles Roddy McDowall with coarse language in THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE.

to investigate Hell House, a splendid fog-shrouded mansion once owned by a depraved libertine and considered "the Mount Everest of haunted houses." Revill brings along wife Gayle Hunnicutt to listen to the exposition and soon the seances and ectoplasmic manifestations are in full swing. Revill is attacked by a roomful of flying furniture, crockery and fire from the fireplace. Miss Franklin is mauled by unseen forces and a possessed black cat. Miss Hunnicutt turns seductress while sleep-walking. Miss Franklin allows a ghost to make love to her, but regrets it when she is crushed by a huge crucifix in the chapel. Revill dies when his machine to exorcise ghostly influences blows up. The surviving McDowall and Miss Hunnicutt find the secret behind a leadlined wall—surprise, it's unbilled horror heavy Michael Gough, his corpse and its evil powers preserved through the years. He was very short, it seems, so he cut off his legs and replaced them with longer artificial ones. And ever since his ghost has been crushing, paralyzing or crippling anybody who can walk. It's a pretty stupid finish, but getting there is so much fun that audiences may not mind. Besides, it's prefaced with an assurance that such things can

indeed happen from no less an authority than Tom Corbett—not the space cadet, but the "clairvoyant and psychic consultant to European royalty."

1971. 20th Century-Fox (Academy Pictures). Deluxe Color. 92 minutes. Pamela Franklin, Roddy McDowall, Clive Revill, Gayle Hunnicutt. Produced by Albert Fennell and Norman T. Herman. Directed by John Hough.

THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE is available on DVD from 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment.

PANORAMA BLUE

Low-budget try at big-scale sex spoof emerges as novel fare that should do OK in both hard- and soft-core markets. Strong promotion of 70mm Stereo sound angles to score with jaded skin trades. Rating: X.

PANORAMA BLUE, a 70mm hard- and soft-core sexploiter, billing itself as "The World's Mightiest Adult Film," parodies the old widescreen Cinerama movies via a small screen black-and-white opening in which executive producer Richard Ellman does a Lowell Thomas-like introduction before the screen opens up for some color

helicopter views of a nude couple making out. Although it tries to appeal to a wider audience, the entertainment level of this Ellman Enterprises release is rather low for any but the usual grunt-and-groan crowd. The tone of the explicit sex is mild enough to broaden its playability somewhat, but fast ballyhoo payoff is likely. Microphone in hand, a slightly ill-at-ease Ellman sets the stage for several sex skits with a spirited, "Well here we are at..." Sexotic locales include the Indy 69 (a car race during which the drivers must bring to climax some busty girls "love starved for weeks" especially for the occasion); a concert hall where musicians play "Intercourse in F Minor" as a couple copulates on stage before a black-tie audience; a Hollywood orgy where the moaning (in Stereophonic Sound) drowns out such humorous remarks as "It feels so mushy!" etc. Technically, the film is less than a marvel—the big ballyhoo highlight—a roller coaster ride with naked lovers

fearlessly going at it in one of the cars—takes place in front of a rear projection screen.

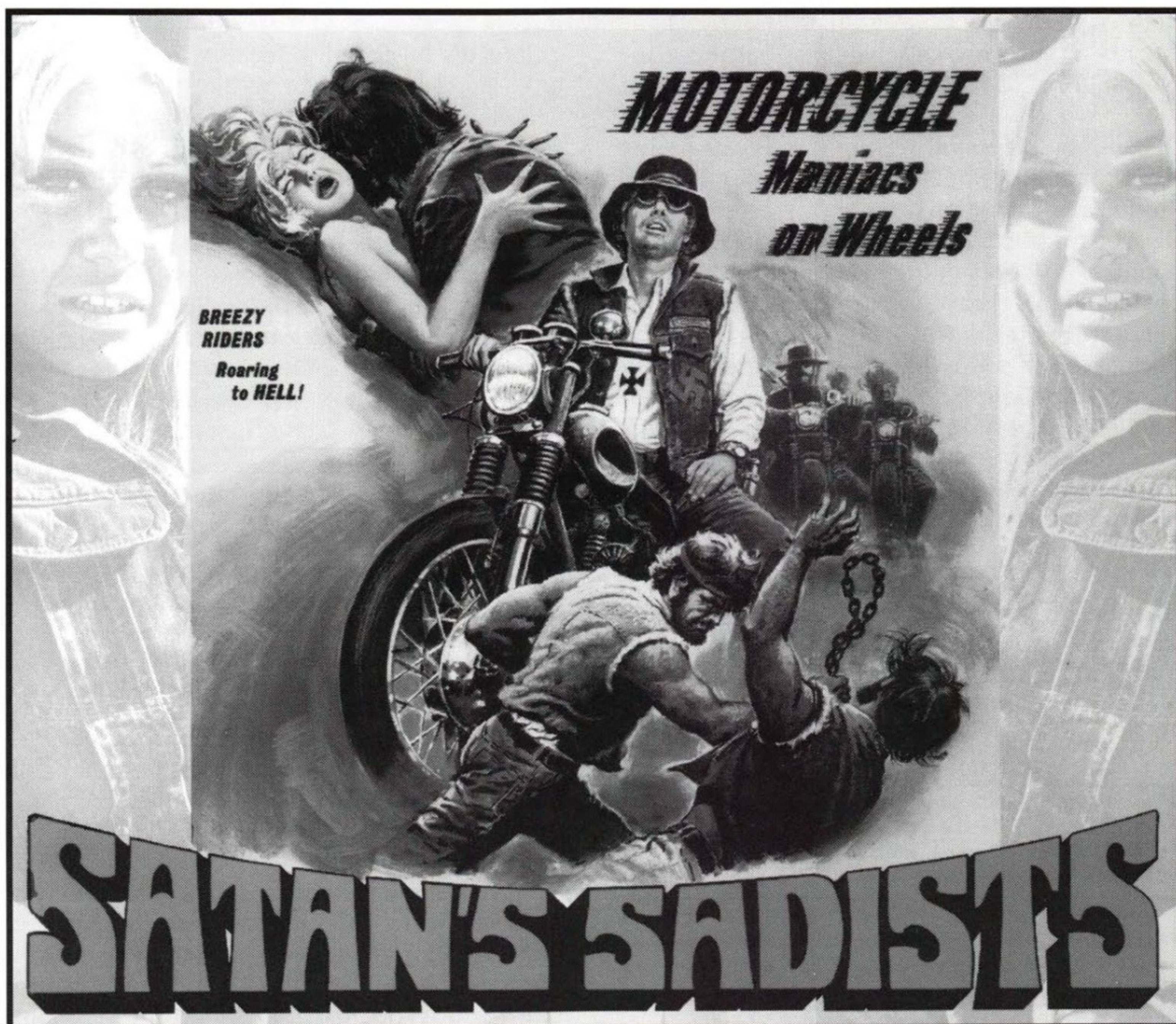
1970. Ellman Enterprises. 70mm PanoramaScope, Eastman Color, Stereophonic Sound. 90 minutes. John Holmes, Rene Bond, Rick Cassidy [Rick Lutze], Sandy Dempsey, Uschi Digard. Produced and Directed by Alan Roberts.

PANORAMA BLUE is available on VHS from Alpha Blue Archives.

SATAN'S SADISTS

Poor cycle-psycho moiler exploits vague similarities to Sharon Tate murders. Passable exploitation value for ballyhoo markets. No Rating.

This ineptly produced but exploitable motorcycle-maniacs-on-the-rampage programmer from Independent-International, which played some situations last summer, is getting a fresh



ballyhoo pick-up as a shocking story drawn from today's gruesome headlines about the Sharon Tate murder case. This ploy, while not unresourceful, is tenuous at best, since, other than dealing with a gang of long-haired killers (not hippies) and having been filmed in the California region where the current suspects once lived, it has about as much relation to the Tate case as it does to the disappearance of Judge Crater. Furthermore, the Al Adamson production is moronically written, blurrily photographed in dim color, amateurishly acted and unconvincingly directed, with only its emphasis on violence and sex to keep the customers alert. Nevertheless, the spurious exploitation link to the current headlines, combined with a few bare breast shots and sex scenes, should enable **SATAN'S SADISTS** to rack up some successful engagements in ballyhoo houses and drive-ins. Chubby Russ Tamblyn is ludicrously miscast as the psychotic gang leader. Scott Brady and Kent Taylor are the only other real actors in the film, both of whom are quickly taken out and shot. Dennis Wayne's obtuse screenplay has the raunchy Satan's Sadists cycle gang wipe out one young couple even before the credits, raping the girl first. Then they invade a roadside desert diner, harassing vacationing policeman Brady's fearful wife with such lines as, "Sure got a nice pair of boobs!" Tamblyn rapes the wife and shoots the couple in the head, along with diner owner Taylor, in revenge for all the poor flower children beaten up by cops. Buxom waitress Jackie Taylor and heroic Vietnam veteran Gary Kent escape, and spend the rest of the picture wandering around the desert. The Satans surprise three buxom girls on a camping trip and force them to participate in a dull LSD orgy before Tamblyn kills them, too. By the end, one Sadist has been killed by a snake, one by playing Russian Roulette, and another crushed in a rockslide. Tamblyn is stabbed in the throat by war hero Kent, who credits the Marine Corps for his ability to survive, adding philosophically that "in Vietnam at least they paid me when I killed someone," which presumably lends an air of social significance to the entire project.

1969. Independent-International Pictures. Deluxe Color. 86 minutes. Russ Tamblyn, Regina Carrol, Scott Brady, Robert Dix, John Cardos. Produced and directed by Al Adamson.

We reviewed The Roan Group's laserdisc of **SATAN'S SADISTS** in VW 48:64. The movie has since been reissued on DVD by Troma Team Video (\$19.99) which we reviewed in VW 75:50. Joe later directed Scott Brady in **GREMLINS**.

TEENAGE FANTASIES

Big grosser wherever hardcore stuff sells, on basis of non-stop, graphic sex action. Hot word-of-mouth will bring out the usual voyeur audience and, possibly, some of the younger adults who are not regular fans of such fare. Rating: X.

A roller introduction announces the intention of **TEENAGE FANTASIES** to show the sex fantasies of today's young people via interviews and reenactments, which hopefully will allow the audience "to discharge their own fantasies in a positive and healthy way." Discharge is the operative word here, as the various hardcore vignettes concentrate on showing copious male climaxes. A rotund young lady opens the film with a graphic and rather messy treatise on fellatio, which the picture returns to throughout for "comic relief," if you can believe it. In other bits, an old man shows a dumb teenage girl a groovy time, a masturbating girl makes it with her girlfriend and her girlfriend's boyfriend, a teenage boy and girl go at it, etc. The energetic performers, only two of whom might actually pass for teenagers, make it look like hard work. The cameraman keeps it all in frame and the moaning, groaning soundtrack is deafening. At the end, a leather-booted but otherwise unencumbered young miss writhes out a sweaty pantomime of the sex act while cooing "You're my fantasy!" to the audience and exhorting them to make a return visit or two. She also suggests they put their hands in their laps—a recommendation that could make the thankless job of theater janitor even more unpleasant.

Fantasy Productions. Color. 83 minutes. Cindy Adams, Sue Franken, Art Dolores, Produced by Samuel L. Striker. Directed by Frank Spokeman.

TOUCH ME

Hardcore "group encounter session" should do well in sex markets. Rating: X.

Eight hung-up types—nympho career girl, aggressive superstud, frigid wallflower, brash salesman, pretty lesbian, impotent introvert, and unhappy married couple—indulge their various sexual proclivities in a 48-hour "encounter session" organized by their pipe-smoking psychologist, who aims to teach them to be aware of their bodies. The result is **TOUCH ME**, another porno sexploiter with the usual quota of explicit sex, some simulated but most of it certifiably

real, as the grueling closeups of throbbing organs attest. Prospects are good wherever porno sells. "Doctor, how can I feel anything with my clothes on?" asks one oversexed wench, and off come the clothes and the inhibitions. They feel each other, lay nude in a pile, pair off in various combinations, fornicate, nibble on and even rape each other—all under the watchful eye of their doctor. Finally, the nympho has all the men make love to her at once, and a therapeutic orgy develops, which the doctor justifies as "all part of being human." The guys are all flabby, but the girls are okay. Production values are par for this sort of stuff, with lots of long static takes. The biggest impression is made by the microphone, which makes several cameo appearances.

1971. Fortune Films. Eastman Color. 80 minutes. Produced by Larry Price. Directed by Sam Weston.

This was the first of more than 80 adult films directed by Weston, the brother of actor Jack Weston (*THE INCREDIBLE MR. LIMPET*); he also made films under the names Sybill Kidd, Wes Brown, and George Spelvin. He also produced the 1981 horror film *THE NESTING*, with John Carradine and Gloria Grahame, and died in 2000.

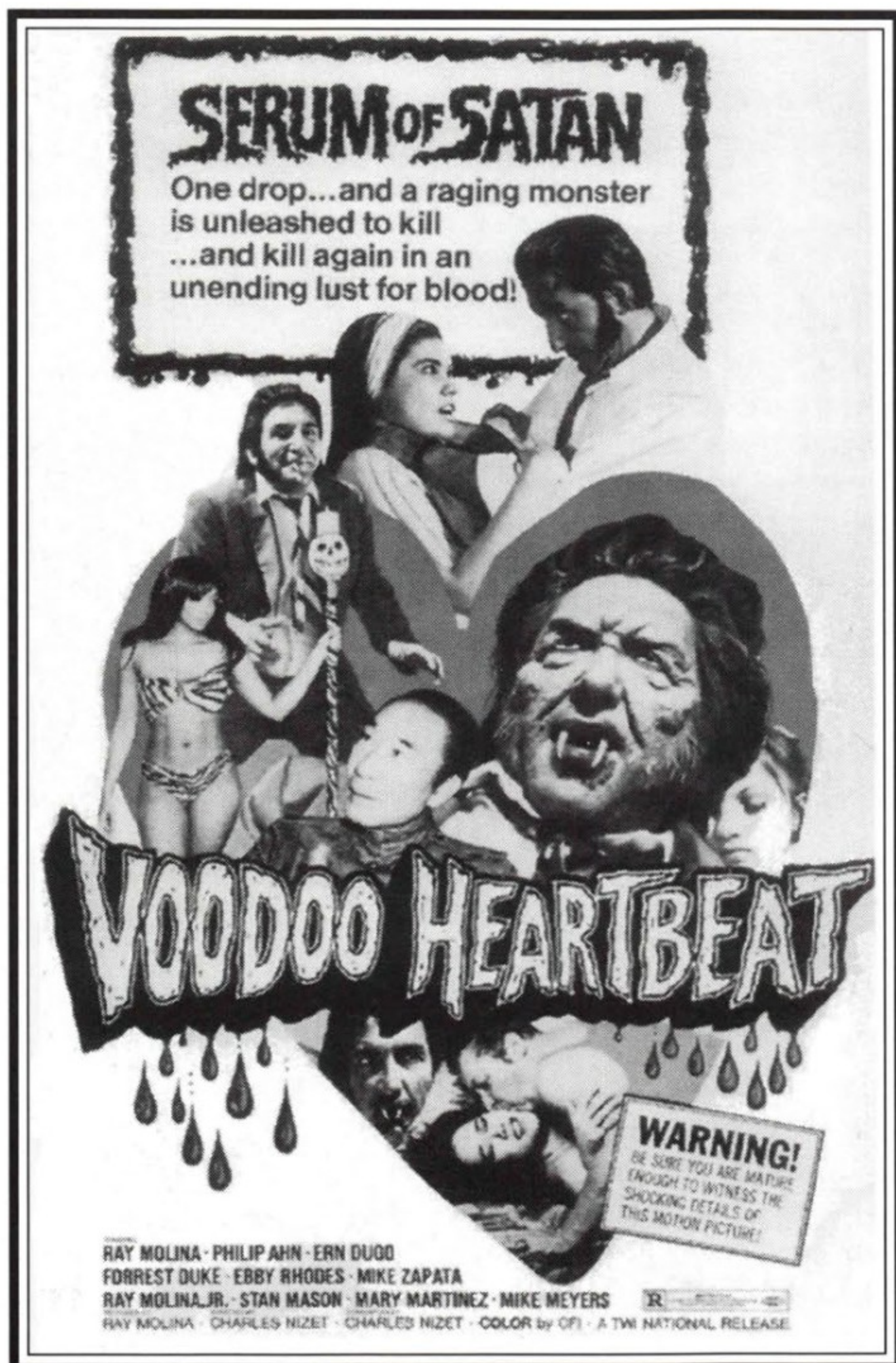
VOODOO HEARTBEAT

Good title and lurid ads may skim some fast playoff business for this horror stinker. It's strictly for bottom-billing in least demanding ballyhoo markets, drive-ins. Rating: R.

During the unreeling of this TWI National release, the philosophical hero notes that "There are some things in life that cannot be explained, let alone understood." Unfortunately, this pic-

ture is one of them. Imagine a '50s nudie without the nudity—that's **VOODOO HEARTBEAT**, a monumentally vapid horror quickie from the absolute rock bottom of the low-budget barrel. Even more damaging than the pitiful production values or the appalling performances (grammar school plays have been better acted) is the final editing that seems to have scissored virtually all the sex and violence from what was obviously conceived as a sex-horror film. The result is 85m of nothing, padded with long, dull dialogue scenes inserted to fill out the running time. The R rating is laughable; the film is very nearly G material. A youth serum falls into the hands of abortionist Ray Molina, who feels impelled to inject himself. He starts acting funny, whereupon his doctor advises him he's suffering from "fagasatosis of the red blood cells by the white blood cells." This causes him to run around some rocky Las Vegas locations shooting picnickers. The police slowly—very slowly—track him down and, although he's supposed to be indestructible, he's easily shot. Charles Nizet's writing, directing and cinematography will be a source of encouragement to untalented people everywhere.

1972. TWI National. Color by CFI. 85 minutes. Ray Molina, Ebby Rhodes, Ern Dugo, Philip Ahn, Mike Zapata. Produced by Ray Molina. Directed by Charles Nizet.



Kay Linaker



*At War with
Tod Browning
& James Whale*

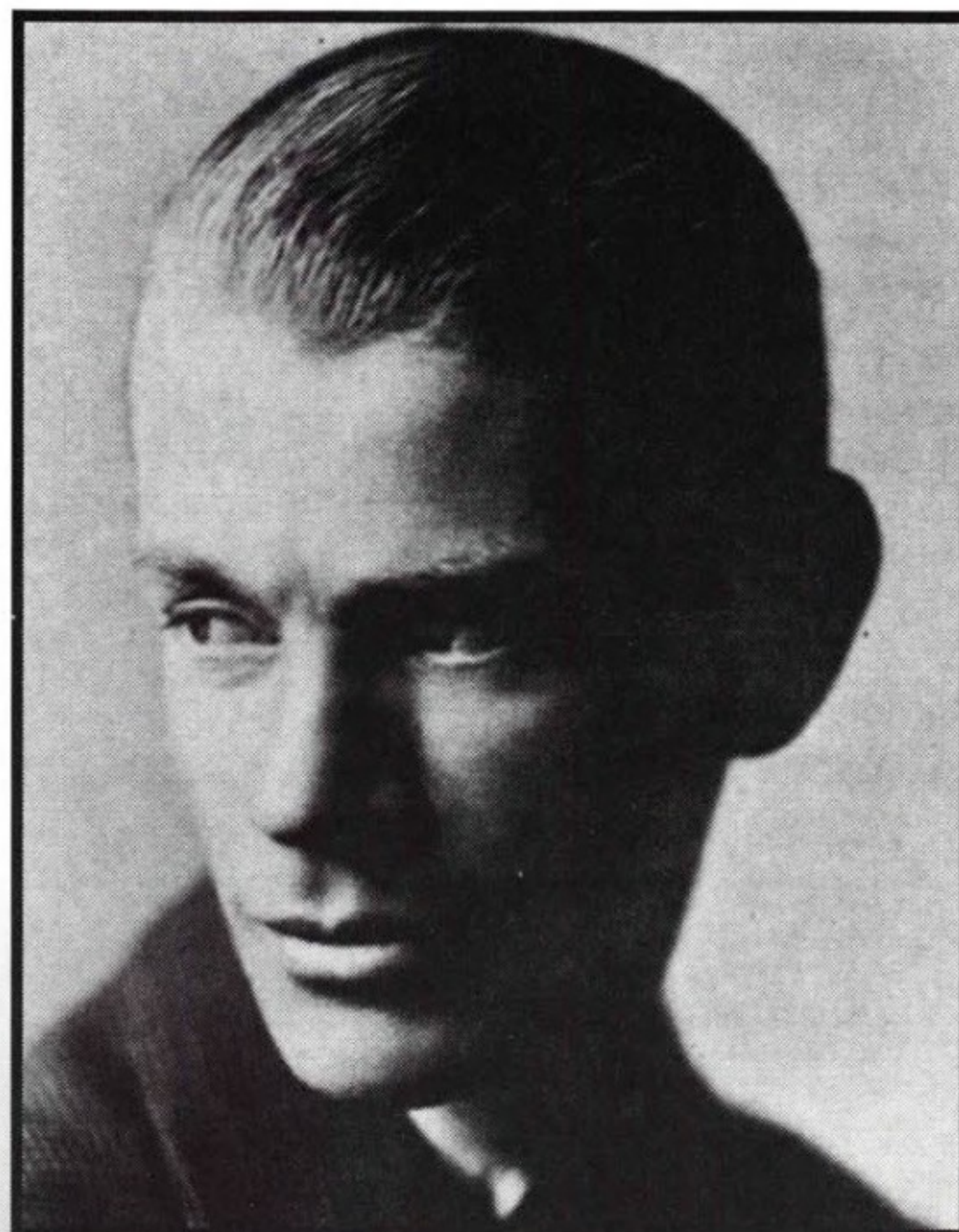
*Interview by
Tom Weaver*

Though she's not exactly a household name, Kay Linaker was a successful actress in the 1930s and '40s, the author of one of the most popular cult films of the 1950s and, as this interview amply proves, a valuable witness to film history.

Glamorous portrait shot of Kay Linaker, as she appeared in James Whale's final film, *THEY DARE NOT LOVE*.

Born July 13, 1913 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Linaker was educated at a private school in Connecticut and later attended New York University. While living in New York, she became interested in the stage and began attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Her work in several small Broadway roles brought her to the attention of screen scouts and she was signed for movie work. After making her first two films at Warner Bros. in 1936, she bounced around from Republic to Monogram and from Universal to 20th Century Fox, where she would eventually be featured in four "Charlie Chan" pictures opposite Warner Oland and Sidney Toler, made between 1937 and 1941: **CHARLIE CHAN AT MONTE CARLO**, **CHARLIE CHAN IN RENO**, **CHARLIE CHAN'S MURDER CRUISE** and **CHARLIE CHAN IN RIO**. During this same period she also made appearances in John Ford's **YOUNG MR. LINCOLN** and **DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK** (both 1939), the cult favorite **BUCK BENNY RIDES AGAIN** (1940), an uncredited appearance as a showroom buyer in Universal's comedic **THE INVISIBLE WOMAN** (1940), and two assignments for director James Whale: **GREEN HELL** (Universal, 1940) and his swan song **THEY DARE NOT LOVE** (Columbia, 1941). While the circumstances behind Whale's early retirement from the director's chair have long been shrouded in mystery and supposition, Linaker was present for his last day in charge of a film set and reveals for the first time the circumstances behind his dismissal.

Tod Browning, circa 1925.



James Whale, circa 1929.

After an increasing number of inconsequential "uncredited" roles (including one in Otto Preminger's **LAURA**, 1944), Linaker retired from acting in the mid-'40s and married singer-turned-writer Howard Phillips. They relocated to the East and, now calling herself Kate Phillips, she began writing for television (her husband became an NBC-TV executive). She also wrote the screenplay of **THE BLOB** (1958), for which she was paid a flat fee of \$125—it went on to gross millions and spawn a 1988 remake. In more recent years, Phillips has taught at universities in Canada and New Hampshire.

In addition to her various careers, in her personal life, Linaker was a neighbor and personal friend to legendary director Tod Browning during WWII, in the years following his Hollywood exile after completing **MIRACLES FOR SALE** (1939). As with James Whale, the details of Browning's retirement years have always been vague, but in this exclusive interview, Linaker sheds fascinating new light on this most mysterious of American directors, and even includes a cameo by the screenwriter of **MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM** (1933) in the bargain!

For Kay's reminiscences about her other accomplishments, see the "Kate Phillips" interview in Tom Weaver's book **SCIENCE FICTION CONFIDENTIAL** (McFarland and Company). —TW/TL



Riding high as one of MGM's top directors, Tod Browning confers with actor John Gilbert on the set of THE SHOW.

You never acted in a Tod Browning movie. How did you get to know him?

I bought a house in the Malibu Colony, not long before the start of World War II. I was living there with my mother, who was then probably pushing 50. I took her for walks; we went up and down the beach. I didn't know anybody there at all. On the second or third day that we lived there, we were taking our walk and we came to this kind of plump, blondish man who was standing with his hands on his hips, looking out at the area behind his house. As we approached, [he] looked at us and said, "Ohhh... so you're the new ones." I said, "Yes," and my mother said, "This is my daughter, who just bought the place. We are going to be very happy in 56 [56 Malibu Road]." He said, "Well, my name is Tod Browning. If you'll wait just a minute, I'll go in the house and get my wife Alice, because she always likes to meet my new friends." So he went in the house and brought Alice out. Alice was small, blonde, absolutely charming. She and my mother became fast friends right at that moment. I stood by and watched this happen. Next thing I knew, Mrs. Browning said, "Oh, please come in and have a cup of tea."

We went in and we had a cup of tea, and Tod came along. He sat with us and chatted, and then

finally he said, "I've got to go out and look again and make up my mind." I asked, "What are you making up your mind about?" He said, "I'm going to plant a garden in the back lot. I don't want a tennis court. We can't put in a pool because of the water level, so I'm going to just put in a garden." I asked, "What kind of a garden?" and he said, "A practical garden—vegetables." I asked, "May I go out with you?"

We went out and looked at it, and he said, "You know, I see a waving field of grain." I said, "Well, I don't know that wheat will do well so close to the ocean." He asked, "What do you know about farming?" I told him about my father's farm, and how my father read the bulletins from the Agriculture Department; everything that was new, he tried. I think he was the first person in Arkansas to plant soybeans. I was telling Tod about this, and he was fascinated, and finally he asked, "What do you think your father would have thought of for here?" I said, "I think he would have tried corn." Tod said, "It's a wonderful idea! I'll plant corn! And, you know, if this is a success, I can sell my vegetables to the store." There was a little store in Malibu, owned by a remarkable gent named Mr. Jones. With that, my mother and Mrs. Browning came out, and Tod [asked] Alice, "Would you like a few flowers?" and she said, "Yes, that would be nice."

I have to ask... how much did a Malibu ocean-front home cost in those days?

Mine was \$32,000. It had a living room, a dining room, five bedrooms and four baths. And a double garage!

Was Tod Browning's house nicer than yours?

Oh, yes! It was more a Tudor house, and mine was like just a beach house.

Planting corn, per your suggestion... Is that what Browning did?

Oh, yes. As you turned into the road at Malibu, the very first garden was Tod Browning's. So as you came into Malibu, the first thing you saw was corn. Right up to his property line, he put in vegetables and whatnot.

About a year later, along came December the 7th... I was making pancakes when the radio announced that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. What followed, as I'm sure you can imagine, were some very, very interesting times. At that point there were, at Malibu, only eleven permanent families, and we had to do everything [homeland defense-related]; we all wore three or four hats. It was very interesting finding yourself in the position of farmer/minute man/gas rationer/air raid warden—everything. My mother was chief air raid warden; her district went from Thelma Todd's to the Ventura County Line, from the tide line back to the crest of the Santa Monica mountains. Imagine how frightening it was [during] a blackout! Your job, when it was your turn to do it, was to stand on the highway with a very small, blue-covered flashlight, waving it up and down to stop the traffic. You always wondered if the first truck was going to see you.

So stopping the first car or truck was scary.

Well, it always was a truck. You see, gas rationing had started. Once you stopped a truck, you had them turn their headlights off, then you went and stood behind it and waved down the next one and the next one, until the "All Clear" came. But, yes, it was the first one that was scary.

There were so few people there in the Colony that everybody had to do a little of everything.

That's exactly right... and you get to know people pretty well under those circumstances. Not everybody there was from the motion picture industry. We had one gentleman who was a corset salesman, and there was a man there who wrote stories for magazines—H. Venor Dixon. He had been a dancer until he read one of his sister's magazines and said, "Hell, I could write something

better than that!" and she said, "Well, go ahead!" So Mr. Dixon did it, and he mentioned to Tod what he was doing, and Tod said, "Well, why don't you talk to my agent?" So he did, and [he] began selling stuff like crazy. And he worked in the things that we were doing.

Did Browning serve on Malibu's gas rationing board?

No. Warner Baxter was on the ration board, and he asked Tod to go on with him, but Tod said, "No, get Katie. Katie'll be fine on the ration board." So I agreed. But what Tod did do was figure out how some people there in Malibu could get around gas rationing. Up in the hills behind Malibu, behind the Malibu Ranch, was a settlement of Italians who had come over to America; they were tailors. They found that they couldn't afford to live down in Los Angeles, so they came up [to the Malibu area] where it got cheap. They would buy a little piece of land and build a little tiny house, and then they commuted into the manufacturing district, the tailoring district in Los Angeles. It was a nice little 45-minute ride; they used to drive in individually in their little cheap cars, their very old Fords and very old Chevys. But, when we got to the point of gas rationing and gas tickets, there was nothing in the rules that said, "When you live 45 miles from your work, you can get special tickets and extra gas"... there was nothing about that in the book.

It didn't matter how far you lived from work, everybody got tickets for the same amount of gas.

Oh yes—and you didn't get much! Finally, Tod came up with an idea: "Why don't you get these people to buy 15, 20 dollar cars," which you could do at that time. "Then we can give them tickets for those cars, even if they don't run." So we followed Tod's idea: we told them to buy cars that were really no good, that they could pick up for \$20. They would bring them home (usually tow them home [laughs]), because the cars had to be on the property. Once they were on the property, we could give them the basic gas ration card for each car. That's how Tod made it possible for them to get to work in their own cars. That whole hillside was littered with these old wrecks [laughs], but that was how we got through it!

How did the gas rationing affect people like you and Browning?

We pooled on everything, to save on gasoline. For instance, there weren't laundromats in

Malibu, so we made a deal with a laundry in Santa Monica that they would do our laundry if we got it in by a certain time in the morning. Then we took turns, one person collecting all the laundry...

From all the different families in Malibu.

...and driving it into Santa Monica early in the morning, waiting 'til the whole thing was done, and then bringing it home to the Colony and dropping it off at all the different houses. That was to save on gasoline. On another day, someone did the marketing for everyone. One person went to the big market in Santa Monica with the lists and the money and the ration tickets from everybody in the Colony. Market day was a long, drawn-out thing, 'cause you had eleven lists! The only way you could do it was if you took one person's list when you got there and did *allll* the marketing for that person, put it in the car, then went back and started all over again.

Eleven times.

Eleven times. Everybody took a turn, and Tod took his turn.

The store where you did the marketing was in Santa Monica... Why didn't you go to Mr. Jones' store?

Because it was too damned expensive [laughs]!

And your mother was the chief air raid warden for Malibu?

Yes, she was. As the chief air raid warden, she was responsible for alerting the army post for anything that came over. We had a switchboard in our house, in case things began to happen. One day I was on the beach, sitting on the bulkhead, when a screenwriter who lived around there, Charles Belden [**MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM**, 1933], came down the beach. This was a gent who sometimes... drank a little bit too much. He was long-legged, long-armed; he had on shorts [and] binoculars around his neck, and I was the first person he saw. He came up to me, breathless, and said, "Look out there! And if you don't see what I see, take me to Cedars-Sinai to dry out!" I looked, and I saw it: a submarine conning tower that had a rising sun painted on it. We could just see the top of it. I said, "You're not goin' to Cedars-Sinai!" I ran into the house and had my mother take a look. Immediately she called, and very, very shortly afterwards—and I mean *very* shortly afterwards—over our house came a torpedo bomber, beautifully camouflaged.

You mean it was painted sky-blue?

Yes, it was painted so that you didn't see it, but on its belly, the torpedo was bright orange. It looked like a robin redbreast.

So you could see the torpedo but not the plane carrying it.

That's right. That torpedo bomber came so close to our chimney, the vibration from the plane going over was so strong that the top ridge of our chimney jiggled right off; the bricks fell down. We kept watching, and after a while, we didn't see the plane or the submarine any more. Of course, they never told us what happened. But three days later, flotsam and jetsam began coming up from south of the Colony, where the tide took it. So we knew the submarine had been hit.

We had all kinds of experiences. Another thing that we had to do was man the fire watchtower on a 24-hour basis [watching for Japanese planes]. We rotated. Tod was one of the watchers; he would climb the fire watchtower and do his eight-hour stint all by himself. I did it too. We all did it. We had to. We would take up a thermos of coffee, and the binoculars were left in the tower.

How high up was this watchtower?

It was on the top of a ridge, and there were about 25 steps up to the top. You climbed up the outside stairway and walked in this little room that was... oh, it couldn't have been more than 8 x 10'. You sat there, and on the walls were the silhouettes of all of the enemy planes, the silhouettes of our planes, and a telephone. Whenever anything flew by, you called and gave the code identification and you gave your identification.

How often did anything fly over?

Not much came over. When it was your turn, you went up and you sat for eight hours. Believe me, it's a long time!

What were the bathroom arrangements there?

There... were ...none! But [laughs], it was something that we all had to do. Then we had to have a First Aid class. Living up near the police station was a retired Army doctor, and he agreed to teach us. I remember he once said, "The thing that's bad about the world now is that the medical profession doesn't acknowledge the really important use of a cow dung poultice." Fortunately, that was not in what we had to learn for first aid [laughs]! He taught us First Aid down in the police station; everybody from the Colony went,



Browning (standing, far right) supervises the filming of the banquet scene from his classic horror film, FREAKS (1932).

except Warner Baxter's wife Wini [silent film actress Winifred Bryson], who was not well, and was excused. But everybody else had to go to the First Aid class.

Because...?

Because there were so few of us that we figured, if anything [like an enemy attack] happened, we would have to go out through our area and take care of our own. Tod and Alice came to the class, of course. And then Alice decided we needed some money to get equipment for our First Aid station, and she decided we would have a sale, an auction of movie stars' little gadgets. Their pocketbooks, cigarette cases, and things like that, which would be donated. Alice made up a list of people and we made calls, and we got astonishing, astonishing donations. We got things like mink stoles and all that sort of thing, because it was *Mrs. Tod Browning* who was having this sale! We held the auction at the police station, and some of the stars who had made donations were there.

I remember that Joan Crawford was there. Such a nice and gracious lady! Well, you never saw such a mob of people as we had. The auction went on from 9:00 in the morning 'til 5:30 in the afternoon. All the time we were there, Tod was there as a runner, along with everybody else in the Colony. We took in over \$3000, and that allowed us to buy the drugs and the gauze and everything that we needed for our First Aid station.

Did you get the impression that Browning was fairly well-to-do?

Oh, yes! He didn't have anything to worry about. But I don't think it mattered to him whether he had a lot of money, or whether he had just enough so that he never had to worry.

Did the Brownings ever mention why they never had children?

That was something that was very, very sad to them. They wanted children badly, But Alice never could have one.



Just plain folks: Browning (left) oversees a rehearsal with (from left to right) Johnny Eck, armless Frances O'Connor, human skeleton Peter Robinson and Schlitz the Pinhead.

So it was Alice's "problem"?

Uh-huh. Alice... she was not too well. That's the reason that they came down to Malibu.

Did Browning ever reminisce about his films?

You never talked about that with him 'cause you knew he didn't want to talk about it. Tod had had a fight with Louis B. Mayer [head of MGM], and Louis B. punished him. Mayer would not release Tod from his MGM contract; there was no way he could get released, but he wouldn't give Tod anything to do. Mayer would send one lousy script after another out to Tod.

For Browning to comment upon, or to rewrite, or...?

No—to see if Tod would direct 'em! Tod would turn them down, of course. And Mayer would call Tod in to MGM, and Tod would have to drive in to the studio and wait around. When his appointment with Mayer supposedly was for 1:00,

suddenly "things would happen" and Louis B. wouldn't be able to see him until 3:00. Tod never did get out of his MGM contract; that's why he didn't do anything more after his enormous success. At one point, he was getting ready to go to the Directors Guild and file a complaint against Mayer. The reason he didn't go was because he realized that, if he did, it would cause great ructions, and he didn't want to be the person who did that.

Did he ever mention what his fight with Mayer was about?

He never talked about it.

Other than the fact that there was a fight.

Other than the fact that he would always refer to Mayer as a "son of a bitch." Tod was tight-mouthed in everything except his marriage and his garden and what he did during the War. He was very open about everything like that. But, you see, Tod would not return dirt with dirt. Consequently, whatever happened [between Browning and Mayer], he just clammed up. That was true

of most people. In the time that I was in California, people did not gossip about one another—at least, not my friends. If something untoward happened, they didn't talk about it.

I don't think I'd have minded getting an MGM paycheck every week for sitting around my oceanfront Malibu home. But Browning didn't think that was a sweet deal?

Oh, no! Because that meant that he couldn't do what he enjoyed doing most—next to gardening!

He was still in good shape physically when you knew him?

Oh, yeah, he was in fine shape, and he had friends all up and down the beach. Actually, he was kind of a loner. He was perfectly satisfied with Alice's company, but when he was called upon to do work during the War, he was right there. Never any arguments at all.

Why did you move out of Malibu?

We decided it would be a good idea to put up a breakwater, a wall, and we found out that a pile-driven one would cost us \$150 a foot. So we all agreed that we would do this. The man came and he started the pile-driving, and each of us paid him as he finished our property. Most of the lots were 40 feet wide, some were 45, some were 50, and some (like Warner Baxter's) were 110. Everybody paid as we went along. Now, the corset salesman was on the road, and we hadn't been able to get to him. When the pile driver people got to his place, they just left it open and went to the next place, figuring they would come back later and do it. Well, the corset salesman did come back, and he said, "I'm not gonna pay for this. If you want this done, you'll have to pay for it." We all got very angry, and we behaved in a child-like fashion: We refused to put in the couple of bucks it would have cost each of us to take care of it. We were going to show him, by God! Well, the people with the pile driver left, and they were not gone three months when we had the storm to end all storms. The ocean came in through this one place, the break in the wall on the corset salesman's property... backed up on the ebb of the tide... and took down one after another of these pile-driven bulkheads. We were left with nothing. Then when the storm got worse, all of our foundations were full of water, and all our grass was killed by the salt water. So we all learned from that, that when somebody refuses to do something for the good, what you do is just...

Bite the bullet and take care of it.

Exactly. What several of us did as a result of this was to sell our property, and I was one of the ones who sold.

After you left, did you keep in touch with the Brownings, or was it a clean break?

I moved into Westwood and then I went on the road with a show. Somehow you don't write to people when you're on the road. So, yes, we lost touch... but I liked Tod Browning. I liked his wonderful sense of humor, and the way he adored his wife; [he] would do anything at all for her. Ours was a very warm and wonderful friendship.

Which brings us to James Whale.

Poor, tragic Whale.

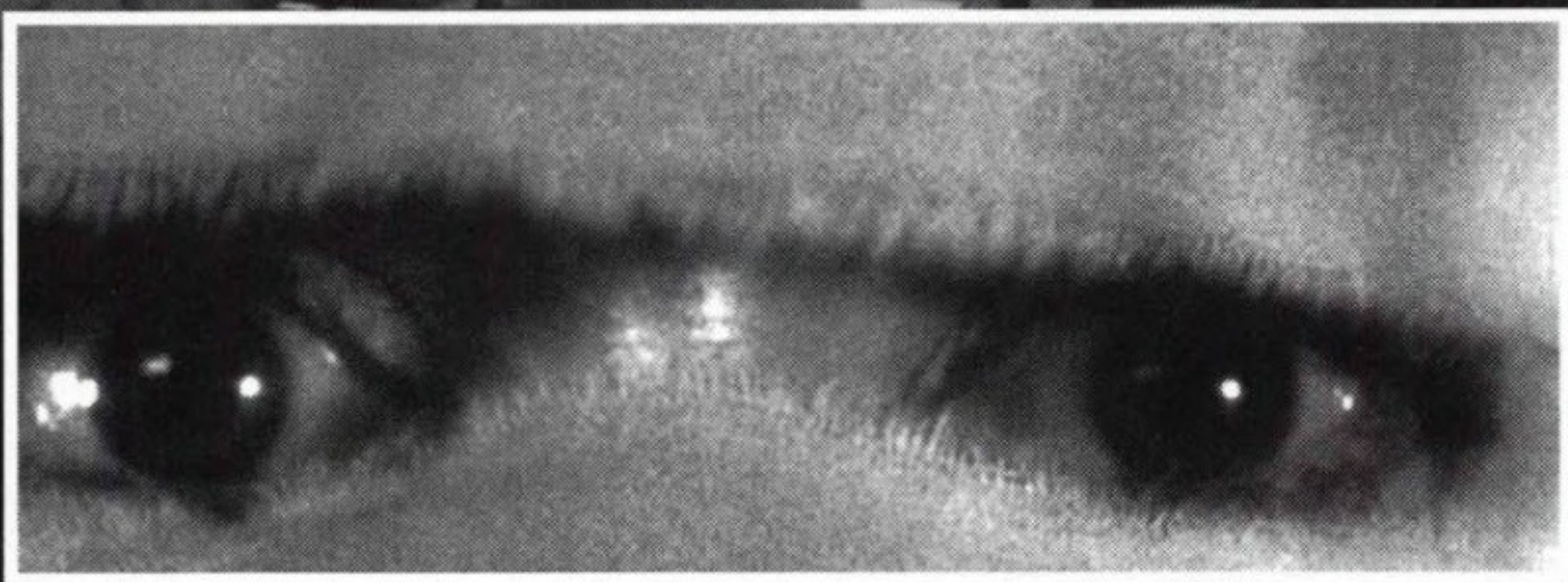
Was GREEN HELL your first contact with him?

Yes. At that time, his star was in descent. Until I met him on **GREEN HELL**, I had never really heard very much about him. The only thing anybody knew about him at that point was, he was a quiet man. Everybody did kind of know that he was of the bisexual persuasion, but one thing you must understand: at that time in California, nobody made anything of that. If they were bisexual... so? That was their particular way of life. As long as your experience with them was healthy and normal, nobody made any fuss. Nobody ever talked about it.

I went over to Universal to see Whale about **GREEN HELL**. We chatted in his office for a few minutes, and he said, "How do you feel about playing a whore?" I said, "If it's a good part, it's fine." He laughed. Then he said, "Fine. Go up to wardrobe." Before I left, he added, "By the way, to save you reading the whole script, I will just tell you that you are 'picked up' by George Sanders [in a South American bar], and later you go on a safari with Sanders and the rest of the group. It's going to be a tiring, wearing experience." I said, "...Yes?" He said, "We are doing it on a sound stage. We are bringing in all of the trees and bushes and whatnot, and planting and watering them. So it will be a really humid, hot set." I said, "Well... everything has its price." He laughed again, and off I went to wardrobe.

How many outfits did you have in the picture?

I only had two outfits: the outfit I wore in the scene where Sanders "picks me up," and I wore jodhpurs and a pith helmet for the jungle scenes. That was the outfit I wore most of the time.



What was the first thing you shot?

My first scene—the bar “pick-up” scene, which has no dialogue—which is the only thing of me that is now left in **GREEN HELL**. The atmosphere on the set at the time was already... really negative. The picture was just starting, but George Sanders had already managed to make himself totally unpopular with everybody. We got the first scene done, and you could feel the negative tension every time Sanders moved in. You see, Sanders had played his first decent part in **LLOYDS’ OF LONDON** [1936], in which he played a bastard. He did so well with that that he decided he would be the bastard. And he was... he majored in bastardry [laughs]! No matter who, he would find something nasty to say about [everybody]! This particular day on **GREEN HELL**, he managed to alienate everybody, everybody from the board boy on up.

And Whale’s reaction to this?

Mr. Whale said nothing. He was very quiet, but he had a kind of a frown. You could see that the very thought of George Sanders was upsetting to him. And you could also see that Mr. Sanders enjoyed that. Sanders enjoyed sort of... making people hate him.

What about some of the other actors, like Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Vincent Price? How did you find them?

Because I was the only woman in the cast who was there—the other women in that bar scene were extras—everybody was particularly nice and “nurturing” to me. They were very, very nice and I formed very pleasant relationships with *alllll* of the gentlemen on the picture.

Except Sanders.

Well, nobody had a relationship with Sanders. Nobody spoke to him. And it really irked him that he would come on the set and make remarks and nobody responded. So then he would go back in his little canvas dressing tent, or he would sit on the sidelines and read. Or he would walk around making remarks to people, not waiting for them to answer—which they wouldn’t do anyway. That man could not say anything kind or pleasant.

The filming of a classic shot: It is Ernest Thesiger who removes Elsa Lanchester’s bandages in THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (top insert), but director James Whale performed the service onset, unveiling the Bride’s eyes for an unforgettable image (bottom insert).

Anyway, we finished that day’s work—there were a couple more days in the bar there—and then we went straight into the first jungle sequences. And it was really hell! It was so humid. It all was mud. And it stank—people got sick from the smell. But you got used to it... you know what I mean? Your senses become bored with sending messages constantly—“It smells bad, it smells bad, it smells bad”—so everybody became used to it. But when we went to lunch, it was unbelievable to step outside—it smelled so *good*! The jungle set was on the largest sound stage at Universal, the whole jungle was built there.

Was the set as hot as Whale had promised you it would be?

Ohhhhhh, yes! They couldn’t do anything about it because, remember, this was before air conditioning. We only had fans, fans that were up high—suction fans pulling the hot air and the stinky air up and out. But the moisture in this mud was too much for the fans; they just couldn’t handle it. And besides, they had to turn all of the fans off when we began to shoot. It didn’t take long for that to become really miserable.

At that point, things [became] a little tough. Mr. Whale became... kind of tense. Everybody was aware that he was unhappy. He wandered throughout the making of that film; he didn’t sit down in the director’s chair too much. He was [always] ambling, and he found it exceedingly difficult to talk with the actors. He didn’t want to look at them when he was talking about how he saw the action, the movement in the upcoming scene. So we [the actors] sort of sat around, and everybody got nicely acquainted. It was a nice, warm feeling, and we had a very pleasant time. But, as I say, when it came time to work, it became increasingly difficult, because Mr. Whale was becoming angry, and he was making side remarks. For instance, if (say) Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., was doing a scene, Whale would sort of mumble under his breath during rehearsal—not to anybody in particular, but you knew that you were not pleasing him. No matter what, you knew you were not pleasing him. This was a great joy to George Sanders, [who] would walk around and make remarks about Whale, nasty remarks, just [loud enough] so that Whale could hear if he was listening. Things became increasingly tense.

GREEN HELL was made at a time when King George VI was getting ready to make a speech to the world; it had to have been his announcement of England’s declaration of war on Germany [September 1939]. One day, it came over the radio



*James Whale (left) and others inform actress Gloria Stuart that it's time to return to the set of **THE OLD DARK HOUSE** (1932).*

that King George was going to make his speech to the world. Because he stuttered, everybody was very interested in how he was going to sound. In order for us to hear the speech, they [installed] radios all over the sound stage. Just before King George was to go on the air, like ten minutes before, the work on the picture shut down, and everybody moved to the radios. We actors moved to a part of the sound stage that had not been dressed [as jungle]. On the edge of the jungle set, where we had all our little canvas dressing tents, we had a semi-circle of canvas chairs where we were going to sit and listen to the speech.

That was when I think Mr. Sanders gave his most convincing performance. He came and stood and said to all of us sitting in the chairs around the radio, "You are not going to be such asses as to pay attention to this fool, are you?" Remember, the "fool" to whom he was referring was the king of some of these people; there were some Britishers on that set. When Sanders made that remark, Vinnie said, "Well, if you don't want to hear it, why don't you just step outside?"

Well, that set things off. Sanders began talking about the King and what an ass he was, and laying bets what the King was going to say. People tried to avoid him—everybody tried to avoid him—but he absolutely kept on and on. All of a sudden, the

radio announcer introduced "His Majesty." With that, Sanders kind of drew himself up and said, "And now, I will interpret..." At that point, Fairbanks came forward and stood nose-to-nose with him, and said, "You will keep your mouth shut, or I will beat the hell out of you." Sanders kind of stepped back, and put that typical Sanders smirk on, and said [with a nervous laugh], "Oh well, now reeeally..." Fairbanks said, "I mean it—with everything in my soul!" At which point, Vinnie got up and moved in, and said, "If you disrupt my listening, I will hold you." At that moment, the King began to speak and everybody sort of froze. Fairbanks and Vinnie and Sanders held their poses—believe me!—through the entire speech. They stood through that entire speech, and Fairbanks was nose-to-nose with Sanders. By the time the speech was over, everybody was sort of breathing deeply. Finally, Sanders said, "You're not—" At that point, James Whale—who'd been sort of "in the background" as this all happened—interrupted and said, "No one gave you permission to speak." And that was the last positive that I heard James Whale say!

Did Whale stay "tense" throughout the picture?

Actually, the further we got into the jungle, the more the script became almost a parody, the

more he seemed to enjoy it. Finally, James Whale was having fun. It didn't dawn on him that this was a horrible, horrible picture, but he seemed to have difficulty in making decisions. When the script girl would say, for instance, "The only thing we have left to do today is the two-shot of Doug Fairbanks and one of the porters," he would say, "No, no. No, we have some more to do." And we would sit and wait while he made up his mind what shot he was going to call. It was almost as though he was "on" something. You know that strange thing that happens to people when they've just taken a drug? When the pleasure and the remoteness seems to come over them? That was what we had with Mr. Whale.

It was a strange situation, because when we had started the picture, everybody thought it would be a good experience. After all, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., didn't have to do anything. Vinnie Price was at the height of his early career. The guy who played the doctor, Alan Hale, was very, very successful. Everybody went into this with a very positive attitude.

About how long were you on GREEN HELL?

About four weeks.

What was your character like? Was she flirty, was she scared, was she...?

I was a *nice* whore [laughs]!

Did Whale give you much direction in the jungle scenes?

No, not really. Anything [I] wanted to do was fine.

How was your character killed?

I was shot with a poisoned arrow. When they stuck it on me, it was kind of in the hollow of my neck.

Did you have any sort of death scene or last words?

No, no, no. By the time they got to me, I was dead [laughs]!

Did you have any contact with Joan Bennett, who came into the picture after your character was killed?

Joan Bennett was a very pleasant human being—very, very nice. She was really a delight. She was almost blind, you know. Her eyes were so bad that she rehearsed with these thick glasses on. Whereas the rest of us had our marks on the floor in regular masking tape, they had to use whiter tape

for her. And she had to know where people were, because she only saw a blur. But she was very sweet. All the things that her sister Constance wasn't, she was. She was just such a nice person.

Any final thoughts on the movie itself?

With just hyping up [the campy parts] a little tiny bit, it could have been a blockbuster, because then it would have been a take-off. As it is, well... Have you seen this abortion [laughs]?

What do you recall about acting in Whale's final feature, THEY DARE NOT LOVE?

My experience with Mr. Whale on **THEY DARE NOT LOVE** was entirely different. I don't know why, in Heaven's name, he ever agreed to do the picture. I don't know why he agreed to any of the casting.

George Brent, Martha Scott, Paul Lukas and you?

He had nasty things to say about everybody. He was in such a desperate state.

So, the same way he mumbled under his breath about (say) Fairbanks' performance in GREEN HELL, he also made his little comments here?

Oh, they weren't little any more! And his language was absolutely amazing.

Four-letter words, you mean?

Oh, yes!

What was this cast like?

Martha Scott had a beauty all her own. She had a freshness and a warmth and a thoroughly good, wholesome, almost fairy-story quality about her. It was the wonderful quality that she had in the play that "made" her, **OUR TOWN**. A lovely, delightful human being. George Brent was one of the really nice guys. He could talk about the ridiculous things that he had done in his life, and be very honest about it, almost as though he was talking about somebody else. He was a thoroughly charming, nice guy. And Paul Lukas was a delightful gentleman. He was pleasant, charming, a talented actor and he knew what he was doing.

The first day we all worked together, we were doing a scene on a pier where I meet George Brent and Paul Lukas. As far as I was concerned, I was havin' a good time! It was a very good part, and it was a part where I had, if I'm not mistaken, 22 costume changes. A great deal of the romance that I had with George Brent was done in [short] scenes—in a speedboat, at the races, dancing in

a nightclub, that sort of thing. A lot of them were process, and there was not a lot of dialogue; it was almost silent picture acting. One thing that Harry Cohn insisted on: I was playing the richest girl in the world and I had to have the kind of clothes that the richest girl in the world would wear. I don't know whether [costume designer] Edith Head got credit on that picture, but she got double pay for designing the costumes. Edith was a delightful person and we were good friends, and she made me some beautiful, beautiful clothes. Harry Cohn insisted that I go to his office and model each piece as they finished it. Harry also made arrangements for a jeweler to come on the set every morning with the jewelry I was to wear, and I was bonded for \$1,000,000! You never saw anything like the jewelry I wore in that. Just un-be-liev-a-ble stuff! The experience of that film was delightful... until James Whale—I swear to you—had a breakdown.

Were you there that day?

Yes, I was. One day, Martha and I were doing the nice little scene where I meet her for the first time. She was playing a young lady who has come to the United States; she was impoverished and working in a dress shop. We had done probably a week's worth of work by this time. About halfway through the first blocking, all of a sudden James Whale said, "Not only do I have the two worst actresses in Hollywood... but I've got the two ugliest fuckin' broads that ever were!"

Well, we just... stopped. Ev-er-y-thing... stopped. And when he had total silence, he began to rave and rant, again [attacking] the two of us. Finally, Martha and I looked at one another, and with one voice we said, "Excuse me, please." We left, and we went into the set dressing room, where we looked at one another and said, "What is the matter with him?" That was just the first of the outbursts.

The next day, Martha brought her husband Carleton Alsop on the set. Rather, *her husband* came on the set. I think he was a business manager or something like that—a very, very nice guy. An average-sized gent, a very quiet man. He came on the set and sat down, and everything went along (we thought) very smoothly. All of a sudden, Whale had to do another set-up with the two of us. Well, the minute we were called, we went over and stood waiting for him to tell us where he wanted us and whatnot. And all of a sudden, he started again.

Again along the lines of "They can't act," "They're ugly" and so on?

Oh, yes! He lost it to such a degree that he screamed and yelled. And when he really got wound up, Martha's husband got out of his chair, walked over to him, and said, "I want you... to shut your mouth. I want you to keep it shut... until I come back from talking to Harry Cohn."

And Whale's reaction?

It was as though somebody had poured cold water over Whale. He just sat down. As long as it took Alsop to run up to Cohn's office, get Cohn and bring him back—that's how long Whale sat. Almost in a daze.

Once he sat down in a daze, what did everyone else do?

Everybody just sat in a daze. Nobody said "boo." By the time Alsop brought Cohn onto the set, Whale had started pacing. Cohn came on with Alsop and walked over and—very, very quietly—said to Whale, "You're through. Get off the set." And that was the end of our first director. From that point on, Mr. Whale just... waited to die.

The "official line" in the Hollywood trades was that Whale left the picture because he'd come down with the flu.

Whenever anybody was having problems with Cohn or Louis Mayer, they didn't dare say that there were problems. If they did, they'd find themselves barred from the lot and all kinds of stuff. So that was the cover-up: the person who was having problems was "ill." Whale didn't have the flu, but he was *reeeally* sick.

That was when director Charles Vidor came in to finish the picture?

We had two other directors. How the picture was ever finished, I don't know. Whale had set this feeling, and now nobody was comfortable. We all had a hunch that this picture would never be released. And it then became particularly difficult for George and Paul, because the second director didn't like *men* [laughs]! George and Paul couldn't do anything that pleased *him*! And he let them know that. You can imagine how uncomfortable and unhappy we all were. This director was a refugee from Germany; he spoke pretty good English, but he only lasted a week. Then we got Charles Vidor.

Finally the picture was ended, and we felt that it was not going to be released for a long time. I never



*Kay Linaker models a fabulous Edith Head gown in this publicity shot for **THEY DARE NOT LOVE**—begun by James Whale, completed by Charles Vidor.*

saw it. I think Cohn was so [fed up with] it by that time, and hated it so much, and it had cost him so much money. Originally, [it] was intended to be a big picture, the picture that was going to be better than anything that Columbia had done up to that point. It was also going to show that [Columbia's number one director] Frank Capra didn't have to do it in order to make it a big picture.

What had been the collective feeling toward Whale throughout his days on the picture?

Nobody on that picture developed a hate for Whale. Everybody [felt] sorry for him. Everybody thought that he should be taken off the picture—yes, we all agreed [on] that—but there was no hate. If he had suddenly come down with TB, we would have felt the same way. We knew he was sick. When he did what he did in front of Alsop, at that point, he was really, really “out of it.” He would have been very comfortable in a padded cell.

Did he again give the impression that he was “on” something, as he did during the latter days of **GREEN HELL**?

No, not so much. You see, after a while on **GREEN HELL**, he thought it was just fine. Everything was fine. He loved everything that was going on. That was why we thought he was “on” something. We thought he was on a happy pill.

Any final comments about your experiences with James Whale?

The only thing I can say is that, at the time that James Whale was having problems, I wish that psychiatric drugs had been further developed, [that he could have used] the drugs we have now for psychiatric problems. In his early life, I understood from little things that people said, he had been a very pleasant human being. Before he got sick, he was a fellow who could do a fine job, as his films indicate. But then there came the breaking point. After that, he was just... not a whole person. He was a “part” individual functioning on... not even two and a half cylinders. It bothered me to see somebody in such bad shape. I wish he had had an easier end.

You knew both Whale and Tod Browning right at the very ends of their movie directing careers. Can you compare and contrast them just a bit?

Well, Tod Browning was a “whole” human being. He was a very, very happy man—in his marriage, in his place in society, and what he did. He was not miserable. Just don't talk about the film business to him, and Tod was fine. He was a gracious, warm, old-fashioned “country guy.” He was a well person. I'm very, very sorry for the other guy.



D V D S



*It Came from Hunger: a gripping moment
from Don Dohler's \$5,000 directorial debut, **THE ALIEN FACTOR**.*

THE ALIEN FACTOR

1977, Retromedia Entertainment,
DD-2.0/+, \$19.95, 79m 42s,
DVD-0

HARVESTERS

2002, Key East Entertainment,
DD-2.0/+, \$24.95, 89m 49s,
DVD-1

CINEMAGIC founder Don Dohler—the amateur's professional—gained notoriety in the sci-fi/horror community by helming a series of 16mm productions that displayed uncommon ambition on budgets so low, you wonder how he could even

afford film stock, let alone lights and special effects. In **THE ALIEN FACTOR**, a trio of deadly creatures descend upon the small town of Perry Hill, leaving several mutilated victims (all male, for a change) in their wake. In an obvious nod to **JAWS**, Mayor Wicker (Richard Dyszel, aka TV horror host Count Gore De Vol) is desperate to keep the killings quiet, so as not to jeopardize a multi-million dollar entertainment complex development deal. The frustrated Sheriff (Tom Griffith) receives some desperately needed help via the arrival of Ben Zachary (Tom Liefert, who

looks like a heavy-set Russ Tamblyn and is the closest thing here to a professional performer), a surly observatory employee from a nearby town. He manages to eliminate two of the monsters, zoo specimens that got free when their transport ship crashed in the nearby hills. To no one's surprise (in the audience, anyway), Zachary is an alien himself, dispatched to Earth to handle the problem.

Dohler's first and best-known effort, this \$5,000 production has terrible acting, highly variable photography, and an aggravating electronic score that dates

the proceedings more than any of the wardrobe or vehicles. Like most low-budget features, it is also heavily padded, with an endless bar sequence showcasing an awful rock band. In spite of all this, **THE ALIEN FACTOR** remains a curiously likeable enterprise thanks to its unyielding sincerity and the obvious desire of its creators to pay homage to the genre pictures they love. In contrast to a lot of the shot-on-video productions flooding today's market, the people behind-the-scenes here clearly tried to do the best they could under pretty impossible circumstances. This is reflected particularly in the creature designs, with the 7' tall "Zagatile" and Zachary's true form (a sort of "inner man" look) quite well-done. The film was profitable for all involved, so Dohler remade it five years later as **NIGHTBEAST**, adding gore and nudity to further increase its commercial potential, but losing a lot of the charm in the process.

THE ALIEN FACTOR was submitted to the MPAA for a rating and received "G," despite some mild bloodshed. When Dohler (who also appears briefly as "Ernie") was unable to negotiate a theatrical deal to his liking, the film ended up going direct-to-television in 1978 via Gold Key Entertainment. Oddly enough, not long after it was first issued on video by VCI in early 1984, the movie managed to get a two day run on New York's 42nd Street on the bottom of a truly bizarre double bill with the 1974 production **FIVE ANGRY WOMEN** (aka **WOMEN UNCHAINED**). We are unable to compare Retromedia's DVD to that earlier release, but the presentation here is in keeping with the production history. The image is grainy throughout, with uneven colors, weak contrasts, and indistinct night scenes; the

sound is adequate. In other words, the movie looks and sounds as it always has: rough but bearable. The bit rate sits at about 60% and rarely budges but the digital compression displays no obvious flaws.

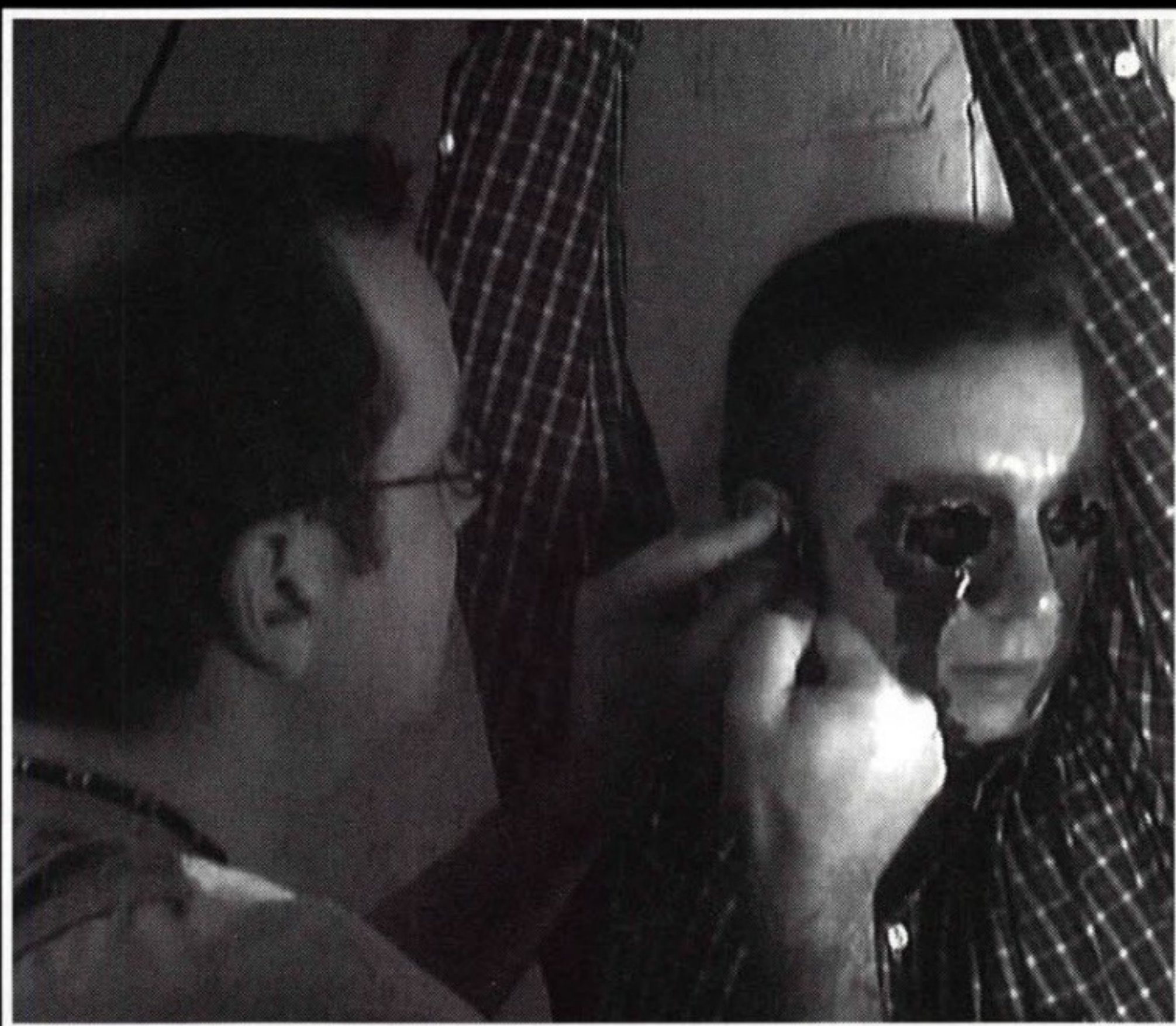
No trailer was ever created for the picture, but Retromedia was still able to come up with some extra features for this release, including a blooper reel and two still galleries, the latter devoted entirely to co-star George Stover. Of most interest is the original, discarded version of the climactic battle between Zachary and the reptilian "Leemoid," which features a cheesier version of the monster and less effective animation. The disc begins with Fred Olen Ray and Miss Kim and the standard Retromedia opening, adding some mildly "R" rated content to an otherwise all-ages release. The DVD was authored by Fat Cat Post.

After a decade's hiatus from the movie business, Dohler served as writer/producer of

HARVESTERS, a remake of his little-seen 1987 production, **BLOOD MASSACRE** (which was first undertaken as a video feature, then re-staged on celluloid). Black leather-clad tough girl Frankie Falzone (Donna Sherman) and her gang of thieves take it on the lam after a botched convenience store robbery. In order to elude a pair of marshals (one of whom is played by the movie's first-time director, Joe Ripple), they take the Peelman family hostage in their isolated home. Mr. Peelman (George Stover) and company come across initially as being rather eccentric, but they are actually human organ dealers who soon turn the tables on their captors. Frankie manages to escape and, using skills she learned as a Marine during Operation Desert Storm, devises a little payback.

Acting and dialogue, never a strong point of Dohler's productions, are a major weakness here. Anti-heroine Frankie is

*George Stover's band of organ brokers accepts a generous donation from director Joe Ripple in **HARVESTERS**.*



too underdeveloped to engender viewer sympathy and the Peelmans are not maniacally personable enough for us to want to perversely cheer them on. The situations are much too familiar and neither the direction nor the videography are stylish enough to compensate. The production is further burdened by the most gratuitous CGI this side of a **STAR WARS** sequel. A computer-generated helicopter is an understandable element, given this production's severe monetary constraints; however, a computer-generated car (piloted by a driver only slightly more life-like than your average crash test dummy) is layered on to a simple establishing shot of a bar exterior. Not long afterwards, *another* digital car pulls up to an equally unconvincing house. The cost of computer effects has come way down in the past decade, but are they now more cost efficient than hiring (or borrowing) a car, or to shoot an establishing shot of an actual home that (as it turns out) is owned by the director? Those in search of cheap thrills will be disappointed to learn that some of the key bloodletting is also rendered with CGI, adding a cartoonish veneer that completely undermines the intended shock.

HARVESTERS was shot on digital video and tends to look a bit soft and hazy. Night sequences are overly dark, but that appears to be a fault of the original production. Colors are decent and the mono sound mix is better than expected, boasting sufficient presence during the shock sequences to jolt any viewers whose attention has wandered. A teaser and trailer are included, along with a 28m 33s "Behind the Scenes" documentary, with an audio commentary provided

during the latter by Ripple, Dohler, and visual effects director Sean Quinn. For some reason, their comments have been put over the program's original audio, rather than provided as an alternate track, making the interview sequences pointless. —John Charles

BOB LE FLAMBEUR

"Bob the Gambler"
1956, *The Criterion Collection*,
DD-1.0/ST, \$29.95, 102m 15s,
DVD-0

Jean-Pierre Melville, born Jean-Pierre Grumbach (1917—1973), has been long considered one of the mentors of the French New Wave. His revered status is not merely due to the fact that he had a vast, encyclopedic knowledge of film and film history at a time when few such *cineastes* existed; it was also due to his passionate commitment to making films. As actor Daniel Cauchy says in the 21m 59s interview included as a supplement on *The Criterion Collection's* important new issue of **Bob Le Flambeur**, Melville was utterly dedicated to the making of a film, undaunted by the fact that he would often be forced to shoot over the course of several months (one day, two days at a time before the money ran out and delayed the production) in order to complete it. The example of his indomitable spirit and love of motion pictures was no doubt, in part, what inspired the younger generation of French filmmakers indebted to him, among them Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut.

Bob Le Flambeur is one of Melville's finest films. Like **Le Samourai** (1967), it contains the stock characters of *film noir*: the sympathetic criminal, the

femme fatale, the cop who respects his criminal counterpart, nocturnal urban streets and alleys. Bob Montagné (Roger Duchesne) is an aging, but still elegant, gambler who has done time in prison but is still impeccable in his dress and manner. Always chivalric with the ladies, he befriends an attractive young homeless woman, Anne (...**AND GOD CREATED WOMAN's** Isabelle Corey), and gives her the key to his apartment. She is soon courted by Bob's young protégé, Paulo (Daniel Cauchy), who falls for her considerable charms. After a night of gambling wipes Bob out, luck has it that one of his associates knows Jean (Claude Cerval), the croupier at the palatial Deauville casino. Seeking one last big score, Bob becomes the mastermind in an elaborate casino heist. He begins to assemble his players and stage the complex robbery, not expecting that Paulo would tell Anne about it, who in turn blabs to Marc (Gérard Buhr), a police informant who happens to be a pimp. In the meantime, Paulo has learned that Anne has been sleeping with Marc, and sets out to kill Marc about the time he has arranged to inform the police about Bob's Deauville heist...

Stylish, poetic, and suspenseful, **Bob Le Flambeur** has one of the best ironic endings in cinema history; moreover, it has been highly influential. According to Melville, in remarks made in a 1970 interview reprinted in the DVD booklet, **Bob Le Flambeur** has been plagiarized at least seven times to his knowledge. He cites Henry Hathaway's **SEVEN THIEVES** (1960) and Lewis Milestone's **OCEAN'S ELEVEN** (1960) as two such films that used **Bob Le**



Police informant Gérard Buhr is snubbed by Roger Duchesne in Jean-Pierre Melville's crime classic BOB LE FLAMBEUR.

Flambeur as their unacknowledged source. ("Milestone's film even contains lines that come straight from the dialogue of **Bob**, verbatim!") The compelling performance of Roger Duchesne as the aging gambler is, in part, what gives the film its poetic elegance. As the seductive moll, Isabelle Corey is also quite good, although in terms of her career, she made the wrong choice to play Brigitte Bardot's foil in Roger Vadim's **...AND GOD CREATED WOMAN** (1956), shot at the same time as **Bob** but without the countless delays in production that Melville's film had to endure. During the course the 1970 interview, Melville laments the fact that her career fizzled.

Criterion's fullframe digital B&W transfer is excellent, having been struck from a 35mm

composite fine-grain master. The 1.33:1 picture is clear and sharp, with good contrasts. The DD-1.0 monophonic soundtrack is acceptable but has little dimensionality, revealing all the limitations of modestly budgeted films made during this period. The disc's bonus materials are very good. The aforementioned interview with Daniel Cauchy, conducted by Lenny Borger in Paris in January 2002, is an excellent conversation, in which Cauchy talks about Melville's personality, his commitment to filmmaking, and his extensive knowledge of films, particularly American films (Melville loved all things American). Also included is a 20m 31s interview with Melville by Gideon Bachmann for his radio program FILM ART, conducted at the Venice Film

Festival in 1961, that plays over a series of film stills (and eventually the French poster art) from **Bob**. The conversation ranges over a number of topics, including Melville's background, the sources of his stories and ideas, his interest in making films in America, and so on. Both interviews are insightful and represent important contributions to film history. **Bob's** 3m 25s French trailer rounds out the bonus materials, but in contrast to the feature presentation, shows some considerable wear and tear in the form of scratches and splotches. A healthy 26 chapter stops have been allotted, and the new English subtitles are fine, although they occasionally fail to capture the flavor of the French slang in the dialogue. —Rebecca & Sam Umland



*In Trolenberg once was a guy, who scaled a mountain that rose to the sky;
up there he got tangled and damn near was strangled by a thing called THE CRAWLING EYE!*

THE CRAWLING EYE

aka **THE TROLLENBERG
TERROR**

1958, Image Entertainment,
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$24.99,
83m 45s, DVD-0

There is little to distinguish **THE CRAWLING EYE** from the many other B-science fiction films of the late '50s. The most interesting thing about the picture—which is never as gleefully cheesy as its US title would suggest—is its demonstration that, even before Hammer began mining the Gothic Horror vein, other British producers were attempting to replicate their product. In this case, it was producers Robert S. Baker and Monty Berman, who—in the wake of Hammer's success with film versions of several Nigel Kneale BBC teleplays—brought forth this, their own TV-derived project, based on a six-episode thriller originally broadcast on Associated

Television's SATURDAY SERIALS in 1956 (the Saul Bass-influenced title credits make no mention of its small-screen origins). They also nicked Hammer's resident screenwriter Jimmy Sangster and American actor Forrest Tucker, who had recently co-starred with Peter Cushing in the Kneale-scripted **THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN OF THE HIMALAYAS** (later, when they began aping Hammer's Gothics with **THE FLESH AND THE FIENDS**, Baker and Berman nabbed Cushing as well). The result seems deliberately calculated to synthesize elements from **SNOWMAN** and the "Quatermass" films, although **THE CRAWLING EYE** sorely lacks the underlying philosophical ruminations that continue to make Kneale's work so fascinating.

Much of the story doesn't make a lick of sense. Tucker, miscast as UN investigator Alan Brooks, is summoned to the Swiss village of Trolenberg by

Professor Crevett (Warren Mitchell) because of the presence of a stationary radioactive cloud on the mountain and an abnormally high mortality rate among mountain-climbers, who turn up minus their heads when they turn up at all. For aliens attempting a surreptitious takeover of Earth, they keep a curiously high profile; this is even a repetition of an earlier incident in the Andes which Brooks also investigated.

THE CRAWLING EYE never becomes thought-provoking since it never transcends its formulaic monster-on-the-loose approach. Like the titular creature of **THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD**, it presents extra-terrestrial beings capable of interplanetary travel but incapable of communication (not even "Resistance is futile") or very much guile. Their previous incursion is referenced throughout, but the script never reveals how

it played out (except that Brooks obviously escaped before figuring out how to vanquish the aliens). The one intriguing idea—lifted from Stoker's *DRACULA*—that humans with psychic abilities are able to tap into the creatures' brains, goes relatively unexplored, as do why the invaders mutilate some of their victims while leaving others intact for later reanimation as homicidal zombies.

It is this failure to explore its own story elements, or even its own setting, that represents **THE CRAWLING EYE**'s greatest shortcoming. Set in a similarly chilly climate to **THE THING** and **THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN**, it never uses the forbidding climate as a menace every bit as life-threatening as the titular creatures. The studio "exteriors"—with obvious painted backdrops and rear projection—aren't as convincing as in those other films, nor are its monsters as menacing; here, the eponymous creatures (there's more than one "Crawling Eye") simply lurk until the opportunity presents itself to snack on the unwary spelunker or foolish villager. When they do finally attack in the finale, out in the open, they are revealed as grotesque-looking—but wholly unconvincing and not particularly mobile—models, courtesy of Les Bowie.

There are films with even more ludicrous monsters which manage to be huge fun anyway, but **THE CRAWLING EYE** is too stodgy for that. The eventual arrival of the monsters undermines that tone rather than pushing the movie into Guilty Pleasure territory—like, say, **FIEND WITHOUT A FACE** (1958). It also frequently betrays its origin as an adapted teleplay—and in the late 1950s the emphasis was still on *play*—

with long, talky sequences confined to single settings. (It is a hallmark of British science fiction, ranging from **DEVIL GIRL FROM MARS** to fairly late entries like Terence Fisher's films for Planet Productions, that much of these films invariably take place in pubs.) There is some debate about whether Hammer's first two Quatermass adaptations—**THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT** (1955) and **QUATERMASS 2** (1957)—did justice to the live television productions, but there can be no argument that Val Guest effectively opened them up into cinema. **THE CRAWLING EYE**, on the other hand, being the first feature directed by Quentin Lawrence (who also directed the original TV serial), didn't have the asset of an experienced film director, and consequently resembles **STRANGER FROM VENUS** with a somewhat healthier budget. On the plus side, Warren Mitchell, Janet Munro (as the imperilled psychic) and Laurence Payne (as the *de rigueur* reporter) do the most with their roles. The film also looks good, thanks to some spacious, nicely detailed sets and excellent photography by co-producer Berman—whose career began as a director of photography on Michael Powell's **SOME DAY** (1935) and **THE EDGE OF THE WORLD** (1937).

Image Entertainment's "Wade Williams Collection" DVD release is a significant improvement over Englewood Entertainment's VHS edition of the same title. Not only is the DVD letterboxed at 1.65:1 and anamorphically enhanced—making the most of the phony snow-capped vistas—but Image have also located the original British version, complete with Eros logo, BBFC "X" certificate and original title. The packaging

promises "a pristine new film-to-video transfer from original source materials" and doesn't disappoint. The widescreen image is impeccably clear and sharp, with only reel change marks to disrupt the glassy quality. The mono audio is also fine, and the film has been given 16 chapter marks. In much worse condition is a dupey, ragged US theatrical trailer (1m 26s) and a disappointingly slim selection of stills (only three) from the Del Valle Archives. The menu pages are nicely animated, with eye-shaped cursors, and get one into the right spirit for a film that isn't quite able to live up to it. —Harry Long

CUBAN STORY

1959, *All Day Entertainment*,
DD-2.0/+, \$24.99, 49m 59s, DVD-0

If history and the keepcase copy on this DVD from All Day Entertainment can be believed, producer Victor Pahlen and movie star pal Errol Flynn "grabbed their cameras" to document the liberation of Cuba from corrupt President Fulgenico Batista y Zaldivar by the "gallant warriors" of Fidel Castro in the winter of 1958-9. For decades, "the land of the rumba" had been a lure for America's rich and famous (actor George Raft owned Havana's swank Casino de Capri), as well as a transshipment hub for the smuggling of heroin into the States by the Mafia's "French Connection." All bets were off, however, when the 29-year-old Castro returned in 1956 from Mexico (where he had fled after serving a two-year prison term for his role in an ill-fated armory raid) to hook up with Argentinean comrade Ernesto "Che" Guevara Serna in a push down from the Sierra

Maestra mountains to take Havana. On New Year's Day 1959, Batista fled Cuba for the Dominican Republic, taking with him \$300 million from the government coffers and leaving behind (it is estimated) 20,000 dead. In the gospel according to Pahlen and Flynn, they were there when Castro mounted the steps of the presidential palace on January 8th and history "exploded around them."

The more likely story is that Pahlen and Flynn bought an existing propaganda film made for the American market (which would explain **CUBAN STORY**'s clunky onscreen title, **THE TRUTH ABOUT FIDEL CASTRO REVOLUTION**), and passed it off as their own, by substituting the original soundtrack for Flynn's narration. The 50m film was never shown in the US; Castro fell out of favor with the free world so quickly that the only audience receptive to this valentine to socialism was the Soviet Union,

where **CUBAN STORY** gave Russians their first look at a revolution they were helping to underwrite. It remains a bone of contention whether Pahlen and Flynn were sincere in their adoration of Castro. Although Batista was plainly corrupt, Castro could not have been perceived as a viable alternative by anyone old enough to remember certain Americans who embarrassed themselves by heaping praise upon The Third Reich for reclaiming Germany from Weimar decadence (happily, Charles Lindbergh and Vincent Price never collaborated on a pro-Hitler documentary). Yet, Pahlen and Flynn gloss over Castro's executions (one shown, beginning to end) of hundreds of anti-Communists while waxing rhapsodic about this "real man." If Pahlen and Flynn were merely Ugly Americans exploiting these events for their own gain (as All Day's David Kalat alleges in his

liner notes—more on these later), then **CUBAN STORY** is the worst sort of exploitation, as unconscionable as **TRIUMPH OF THE WILL**—but without the philosophy.

Whatever its agenda, **CUBAN STORY** is riveting stuff, from Errol Flynn's rambling on-camera introduction (the 50-year-old actor looks bloated and sweats copiously while trying to explain the allure of Castro to men like himself "who think they can drown the pains of this world with a couple of good daiquiris") to the newsreel-style footage of *fidelistas* massing in the mountains ("...a skirmish here, a bivouac there, always moving..."), of gun battles, bombings, the burning of government buildings (Havana's airport was torched to block the entry of government reinforcements), the exhumation of Batista's victims and the trials that doomed hundreds of "stool pigeons" to their deaths. Che Guevara is shown briefly as "the hero of Santa Clara," but neither he nor Castro are heard speaking. (The Maoist Che would soon fall out with the Marxist-Leninist Castro and found himself *persona non grata* in Cuba as early as 1966; he was captured and killed in Bolivia the following year, while spreading the spirit of revolution to Latin America.) In place of synch sound, the soundtrack is larded with sound effects (gunshots, crowd murmuring, applause), revolutionary ballads and *canciones de libertad*. Flynn provides some history for these visuals, but is often caught clueless as to what is actually transpiring onscreen. During one military honors ceremony, Flynn pipes in with the observation "This is a sort of... medal-pinning moment" and leaves it at that. One would think that, had Flynn and

Errol Flynn, sweating like a can of beer in the summertime, enters the mondo movie sweepstakes with CUBAN STORY.





A remarkable performance by young Fernando Tielve highlights Guillermo del Toro's elegant ghost story, THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE.

Pahlen actually shot this footage themselves, they would know what was going on.

The lack of proper historical perspective that haunts **CUBAN STORY** extends to its presentation on this exclusive DVD edition from All Day Entertainment. There are no supplementary materials on this disc (which is encoded with 10 chapters) that might have provided something in the way of an historical guide to shed additional light on the events it claims to depict. A timeline of Cuban history would have been appreciated, but All Day forfeits facts to parrot the party line of Pahlen and Flynn's "strange, but true" Cuban adventure. David Kalat's liner notes are similarly unhelpful, using up valuable ink to take cheap shots at Flynn's legendary alcoholism (Flynn survived the revolution by less than a year, his body wasted by substance abuse and longstanding diseases), whom he maintains tracked Castro

"from saloon to saloon" and even plotted to assassinate him! (Kalat offers no source for this bizarre bit of intel.) For a film shot rough, **CUBAN STORY** looks remarkably fine, although the expected blemishes inherent to newsreel footage are all present. The sound is more problematic, suffering from a bit of ambient hum and hiss. The tacked-on sound effects occasionally even drown out Flynn's narration (and at 22m 13s, it sounds for all the world as if someone in the recording booth whispers "Pass the tequila"), but the presentation is satisfying.

Victor Pahlen's daughter Kyra appears in a 3m 9s video introduction (taped at New York's Anthology Film Archives) and the disc is attractively illustrated by David Landis with artwork depicting raised rifle barrels silhouetted against the Cuban flag; one might carp that these are the shadows of M-16 rifles (easily recognizable by their distinctive

muzzle compensators), which the US Army did not get around to inventing until 1967—and which therefore played no part in the Cuban revolution—but the lesson here seems to be that one should never let history stand in the way of a good story. —Richard Harland Smith

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

El Espinazo del Diablo

2001, Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, DD-5.1/16:9/LB/ST/+, \$24.95, 107m 39s, DVD-1

Considering the praise heaped upon Tim Burton (beneficiary of the most forgiving fanbase of any fantasist, living or dead) for his loyalty to the preoccupations of his youth, it's odd that more fuss isn't made over Guillermo del Toro. The Guadalajara-born del Toro was, like Burton, an avid comic book collector turned gifted illustrator, who produced his first film, studied special makeup effects

design under Dick Smith, and served an apprenticeship in television before directing his first theatrical feature (the Mexican-US co-financed vampire tale **CRONOS** [1993, reviewed VW 26:10])—all before age 30. Critical praise for **CRONOS** north of the border won del Toro the job of directing the subterranean sci-fi thriller **MIMIC** [reviewed VW 46:12], which—tainted by studio tampering (mandated by the caprices of test audiences) and a diffident Miramax release—underperformed at the box office. Del Toro's third film, **El Espinazo del Diablo** (produced by Pedro Almodóvar, a fan of del Toro since the two met at the 1994 Miami Film Festival) enjoyed a limited US theatrical run in the autumn of 2001 as **THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE** and marks an invigorating return to specifically Spanish themes.

Firmly planted in the ghost-child subgenre of Mario Bava's **KILL, BABY... KILL!** [*Operazione Paura*, 1966], Richard Loncraine's **THE FULL CIRCLE/ THE HAUNTING OF JULIA** (1976), Peter Medak's **THE CHANGELING** (1979) and **RING** director Hideo Nakata's recent **DARK WATER** (2002), **THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE** pulls an intriguing reversal of genre expectations, back-grounding its seeming central story of haunting (with all the expected baroque trappings) to the greater, historical horrors of the Spanish Civil War. Set during the final months of that bloody three-year conflict, in which the leftist Republicans fought in vain to protect liberty from Francisco Franco's right-wing Loyalists, **THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE** is set almost entirely within the gloomy confines of a boarding school-cum-orphanage safeguarding children whose

fathers have died fighting the good fight. Newly deposited at Santa Lucia by his family tutor, young Carlos (Fernando Tielve) learns to fear not only an unexploded bomb stuck in the school's dusty courtyard and the ire of resident bully Jaime (Iñigo Garcés), but also nightly manifestations by Santi—a student who died mysteriously, years earlier, and whose restless spirit has been nicknamed "*el quién suspiros*" ("the one who sighs"). While his young comrades give a wide berth to both bomb and bogie, Carlos (who finds too late that he occupies Santi's vacated bed) takes it upon himself to discover the shadowy secret of Santa Lucia, as the war rages on beyond its high walls.

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE wastes no time in serving up lingering looks at the spectral Santi (a haunting pantomime by Junio Valverde), proof that del Toro is interested less in the hide-and-seek dynamic of the standard Gothic ghost story than in the use of his *fantasma* to symbolize the suppression of desire, of love and—more to the point—of truth. While ghostly children cannot help but recall (at least for Anglos) the works of Henry James and M. R. James, **THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE** is more akin to the fiction of Gabriel García Márquez, for whom the Supernatural is rooted in the Commonplace. For all his ectoplasmic proclivities, Santi is just another boarder at Santa Lucia: no less damaged than the traumatized Jaime, no less wounded than the one-legged headmistress (Marisa Paredes), and no less displaced than the avuncular Dr. Casares (**CRONOS'** Federico Luppi), a man of science forced to feed his charges through the sale of a bogus curative made

from spiced rum in which floats the stillborn fetuses of deformed children ("*los niños de nada*"). Obsessed with the appurtenances of antiquity (a fetish embodied in Paredes' prosthetic leg, an elegantly repulsive contraption of wood, leather, gold paint, and gleaming steel), del Toro has made his most personal film an elegy to those whose sacrifices robbed them of a rounded life, and whose thwarted youth haunts the memory, "like an emotion suspended in time, like a blurred photograph, like an insect trapped in amber."

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE has been given a problematic 16:9 DVD release by Columbia Tristar. The disc is letterboxed at 1.85:1, with the image appreciably (and purposely) brighter than in most theatrical prints—all the better to appreciate del Toro's subtle use of CGI (particularly in the plumes of blood that curl *upwards* from the crack in Santi's head). The color palette chosen by del Toro and cinematographer-of-choice Guillermo Navarro (**FROM DUSK TIL DAWN**) observes the tension between hot and cool colors, between amber hues and steel blue night shades—painterly compositions that appear beautifully rendered in standard playback. Viewed in 16:9, however, artifacting becomes quite noticeable in the many dark scenes—but in essence, though so enhanced, the disc cannot be viewed in 16:9, except in its original Spanish language. The removable English subtitles are positioned below the frame, which means they are offscreen, except for the occasional top line of a two-tiered subtitle. The 5.1 Dolby Spanish soundtrack deftly alternates between eerie calm and explosive interludes, and the disc has 28 chapter stops.

Extras include an already faded, fullframe trailer (2m 9s), accompanied by an eclectic—but not random—selection of previews (William Castle's **13 GHOSTS**, Almodóvar's **ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER**, Zhang Yimou's **NOT ONE LESS**). Also included are five storyboard-to-screen comparisons (with a choice of viewing the pen-and-ink renderings alone or a split screen of the boards and the actual footage) and a "Making Of" featurette (12m 55s)—which throws in a whopper of a plot spoiler before the 30s mark, so beware.

"Every war story is essentially a story about memory," Guillermo del Toro maintains in an accompanying audio commentary shared with DP Navarro. Their partnership goes back well over a decade, when the two Guillemos met (del Toro heading the make-up crew) on the set of Nicholas Eschevarria's historical adventure **Cabeza de Vaca** (1990; reviewed VW 32:12). After the disappointment of **MIMIC** (and prior to helming **BLADE II** for New Line) del Toro relished working on a smaller scale and with near total control (apart from a tornado that destroyed his set before one frame of film was in the can). The collaborators' warm but insouciant friendship is infectious and the commentary (spoken in fluent, Spanish-inflected English) makes for a pleasant accompaniment to the film. Del Toro acknowledges his influences in John Ford, Bulgaria-born *empaquetage* artist Christo, 19th Century illustrator Arthur Rackham and in Mario Bava (del Toro jokingly refers to **THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE** as his "Mario Bava western"). While it has become fashionable for the makers of modern day horror films to cite Bava as an influence, del Toro proves that he has not simply an appreciation of the late



Louis Gossett, Jr.—in his pre-Oscar "Lou Gossett" days—as a preacher with a skeleton in his closet in the worthwhile possession drama, **J.D.'S REVENGE**.

maestro, but an *understanding* of the sense-based dread that was Bava's stock-in-trade (no doubt the man behind **KILL, BABY... KILL!** would applaud del Toro's coinage of the phrase "the metaphysics of an empty room"). Philosophical and serious-minded, del Toro also exhibits a self-deprecating sense of humor, referring to his melodramatic *longuers* as "pure Velveeta" and warning purchasers of this DVD against "hearing this silly commentary without seeing the movie." —Richard Harland Smith

J.D.'S REVENGE

1976, MGM Home Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+, \$14.98, 95m 28s, DVD-1

Sold as part of MGM's "Soul Cinema" series, **J.D.'S REVENGE** might be taken for an off-label blaxploitation actioner lacking

the name recognition of **SLAUGHTER, BLACK CAESAR** or **FOXY BROWN**. It would be a shame if '70s *cineastes* passed on this 1976 AIP release for that reason, as it is one of the better possession-themed horror films of the decade.

Less reminiscent of William Friedkin's **THE EXORCIST** than of Arthur Lubin's **BLACK FRIDAY** (a minor Boris Karloff programmer from 1940, about an egg-head collegian given the brain of a hoodlum) or Waris Hussein's **THE POSSESSION OF JOEL DELANEY** (in which the scion of an upper crust Manhattan dynasty is corrupted by a Puerto Rican *fantasma*), **J.D.'S REVENGE** attends the spiritual meltdown of Ike (Glynn Turman), a New Orleans law student and part-time cab driver whose soul is annexed by murdered gangster J.D. Walker (David McKnight). While the "repressed" Ike initially

welcomes the empowerment that accompanies *les bon temps*, the kindly hack soon finds himself slashing a bloody swath across the Big Easy, forcing him to seek the counsel of "jackleg preacher" Elija Bliss (Louis Gossett, Jr. in his "Lou Gossett" days)—who played a larger role in J.D.'s murder than he would like his congregation to know.

Directed by Arthur Marks (**DETROIT 9000**), **J.D.'S REVENGE** was released at the twilight of the blaxploitation boom, along with such barrel scrapings as **BLACK STREETFIGHTER**, **THE BAD BUNCH**, and William Crain's jive **BLACULA** follow-up **DR. BLACK MR. HYDE**. Despite a surfeit of slashings and sexual assaults, **J.D.'S REVENGE** (as written by Jaison Starkes) emphasizes character over carnage and shows sensitivity to the plight of its protagonist—a black man using his intelligence to establish himself in a culture that devalues his innate decency and respect for the law. Sidestepping racism as a narrative catalyst, the filmmakers pinpoint evil in the acceptance by blacks of violence towards one another (a conceit alluded to in an early scene of a football scrimmage that turns ugly). After J.D. compels his unwitting host to brutalize his own fiancée (Joan Pringle), Ike is reassured by a friend (Carl Crudup) that it is a man's prerogative to go into his "nigger act" whenever women need to be shown "where the lions are." With his bookish demeanor and pipe-smoking marking him as a brother interested more in getting over than getting down (the sin also of Duane Jones' academic hero in **GANJA AND HESS**), Ike could be said to deserve his supernatural shackles—but when the film's resolution shifts focus to

the conflicted Reverend Bliss (an accessory to J.D.'s murder, born out of a moment of righteous but misdirected anger), **J.D.'S REVENGE** reveals itself as a tale of social accountability rather than racial redemption.

It would be easy to oversell **J.D.'S REVENGE**, which is hampered in its spookery by a reliance on cheap optical effects and the overuse of flashbacks. The film is more diamond-in-the-rough than lost classic, but does honor its theme of undying anger far more aptly than Curtis Harrington's similar **RUBY** (or Ernest Dickerson's more recent **BONES**, for that matter). Marks' cast is uniformly strong—especially Joan Pringle (whose bares more than her body in one protracted sex scene), Lou Gossett and the delightfully-named Fuddle Bagley (and isn't that **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN**'s Vernel Bagneris in the audience of the hypnotist's floorshow where Ike's troubles begin?). Best known at the time for his star turn in Michael Schultz's **COOLEY HIGH** (1975), Glynn Turman went on to contribute intense performances to Ingmar Bergman's **THE SERPENT'S EGG** (as the *vagina dentata*-obsessed customer of a Weimar bordello) and as a soldier whose mind is blown by Army LSD in the fact-based TV-movie **THORNWELL** (1981) before demand for his services faded and his roles were reduced to walk-ons in such films as Joe Dante's **GREMLINS** (1984) and Bill Duke's **DEEP COVER** (1992). In 1976, Turman and fellow New Yorker Gossett (whose career soared after this) also appeared in Krishna Shah's **THE RIVER NIGER** (an adaptation of the play by Joseph Walker) at a time when Hollywood A-films featuring black

casts and themes germane to African-American life were on the rise (Gordon Parks **LEADBELLY**, John Badham's **THE BINGO LONG TRAVELING ALL-STARS AND MOTOR KINGS**, Michael Schultz' **CAR WASH** and the Gladys Knight vehicle **PIPE DREAMS**)—a promise that went unfulfilled as the '70s yielded to the '80s and the studios focused their energies on celebrating the joys of being free, white and under-21.

MGM's affordable DVD of **J.D.'S REVENGE** (which can be had for less than \$10 in most stores) replaces the film's earlier incarnations as an Orion fullframe VHS tape and an Image laserdisc. The transfer is very attractive, with solid colors and sharp contrasts, and is offered in both fullscreen and anamorphic letterboxed (1.85:1) presentations. While the letterboxed version is crisper, the framing is tighter vertically—bottom line, either will do. The mono sound is also first-rate. MGM offers the film with an alternate French language soundtrack (*a propos* to a film set in New Orleans), with optional French and Spanish subtitles and English close captioning. The disc has been given 16 chapters and the only extra is a nappy, faded 2m 7s theatrical trailer narrated by Adolph Caesar, hawking the film's wares via rhyming couplets. —Richard Harland Smith

JULIET OF THE SPIRITS

Giulietta degli spiriti

1965, *The Criterion Collection*, DD-1.0/16:9/LB/ST/+, \$29.95, 137m 18s, DVD-0

Made on the heels of 8½ [reviewed VW 84:50], which won the Oscar for "Best Foreign Film" at the 1964 Academy



Giulietta Masina investigates her husband's infidelities by consulting a medium (Fredrich Ledebur) in Fellini's JULIET OF THE SPIRITS.

Awards, Federico Fellini's full-color follow-up ***Giulietta degli spiriti*** enjoyed a slightly bigger gross at the Italian boxoffice but proved a financial and critical dud worldwide and was written off as a navel-gazing exercise in style-over-content. The project signaled the end of an era for the Rimini-born *maestro*, who would never again work with scenarist Ennio Flaiano, designer Piero Gherardi, cinematographer Gianni di Venanzo (who died prematurely in 1966) or producer Angelo Rizzoli, who had rescued ***La dolce vita*** when original producer Dino de Laurentiis bailed in pre-production. **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** also marked Fellini's last collaboration with wife Giulietta Masina for nearly 20 years and led him next to the stillborn ***Il viaggio di G. Mastorna*** (litigation over which cost Fellini a good share of his 8½ earnings) and a near-death experience in the spring of 1967—but that's getting ahead of the story.

8½ had been informed by Fellini's understanding of Jungian dream analysis; between completion on that film and pre-production on **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS**, Fellini not only dropped acid (in a monitored psychiatric setting) but delved into the occult. After visiting a number of mediums and "white" magicians, Fellini and co-scenarists Flaiano, Tullio Pinelli and Brunello Rondi devised the tale of a middle-aged housewife (Masina) who, discouraged by the infidelity of her husband Giorgio (Mario Pisu), turns for guidance to a collection of seers, psychics, artists and psychoanalysts. Aiming for a highly stylized and highly synthetic look (**THE WIZARD OF OZ** was an inspiration), Fellini ordered designer Piero Gherardi to fabricate a world of impossibly perfect, untouchable surfaces where society matrons swan about in impossibly large hats with veils or wide brims that discourage fleshy contact; indoors, characters are obscured from one another by deep shadows, even

when standing face-to-face. It is in this false, non-nurturing environment that Giulietta is forced to transform herself from a woman "of no visible charm" into an independent spirit able to put her past behind her, to find her own voice and move towards a new beginning. No wonder the **CAHIERS DU CINEMA** set hated **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS**: Fellini had made a chick flick.

An early Fellini champion, Roman Polanski (who had seen 8½ at the 1963 Cannes Film Festival) crafted his psychodrama **REPULSION** (1965) as a similarly dream-like, but overtly horrific, study of the madness born from the tension of fantasy and repression; his later **ROSEMARY'S BABY** (1968) shares with **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** a female protagonist beset by uncertainty and the machinations of interested parties. Seen in retrospect, **JULIET** occupies a prominent position in a subcategory of films focused on frustrated women attempting to divine meaning from a fearful

panoply of signs and symbols—a list that includes such disparate titles as Herk Harvey's **CARNIVAL OF SOULS** (1962), Michelangelo Antonioni's **RED DESERT** [*Deserto rosso*, 1964], Mario Bava's **LISA AND THE DEVIL** (1973), Dario Argento's **SUSPIRIA** (1977) and, more recently, Todd Haynes' caustic 1995 satire **SAFE** (which featured **SUSPIRIA** star Jessica Harper in a small role). As Antonioni had done with **RED DESERT**, Fellini and Gianni de Venanzo chose to work with color for the first time on **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS**, adding to the heady mix an element of pure sensation. Like **SUSPIRIA**'s Suzy Banyon, Giulietta finds herself compelled by an extrasensory impetus ("The ether is full of voices giving orders") into the forest and the shadowy corridors of foreboding houses, where curtains billow like winding sheets and the air crackles with whispers.

Whether due to his reputation as a Neorealist apostate or to his association with art cinema, Fellini never got any credit from Italian filmmakers working in the realm of *fantasia*—yet it's all up there on the screen. The *chic* chiromancy that initiates **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** anticipates the deadly diversions of Mario Bava's **FIVE DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON** [*Cinque bambole per la luna d'agosto*, 1970] and the parlor games that augur ill in Alberto de Martino's **THE ANTI-CHRIST** [*L'Anticristo*, 1974; whose possessed *protagonista* is a dead ringer for **JULIET**'s mediumistic "Bishima"). The existential *eroe* of Fellini's aborted *Il viaggio di G. Mastorna* was to discover his elapsed mortality aboard a jumbo jet—a conceit that provides the coda to Mario Bava's **LISA AND THE DEVIL** (whose title seems an overt reference to **JULIET OF**



BLOOD AND BLACK LACE's Mary Arden cameos as a television self-help guru in JULIET OF THE SPIRITS.

THE SPIRITS). **SUSPIRIA** borrows from **JULIET** a talismanic buzzword ("iris"), the iconic image of a peacock rendered in colored glass, and the parting shot of a woman walking free of a troubled house. Small wonder the film inspired so much abject horror—one of its least-discussed qualities is how scary **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** is, particularly when Giulietta is plagued by visions of herself as a child, dressed by nuns as a Christian martyr for a church play. Why the grim **REPULSION** fared so well in 1965 and **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** so poorly is a mystery; no doubt audiences preferred watching the alluring Catherine Deneuve more than they did the dowdily impish Giulietta Masina.

It is broadly accepted that Fellini swiped his vision of the Devil as a little blonde girl (for his "Toby Dammit" segment of the 1967 omnibus **SPIRITS OF THE DEAD**) from the "Melissa Graps" character in Mario Bava's **KILL, BABY... KILL!** (1966)—but

here is the spectral *signorina* a full year earlier (at 48m 29s), in blonde braids and dressed for communion to spook the mature Giulietta. Film historians are loathe to mention *Il Maestro* and his pulpy *paisan* in the same breath, but there does seem to have been a bit of one-upsmanship going on between the men. **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** begins with a 13s camera push into a gated country estate shrouded by trees and night shadows, which seems to quote the opening move of Bava's **BLOOD AND BLACK LACE**, released in Italy in 1965 just as **JULIET** began principal photography. Fellini was at first apprehensive about the prospect of filming in color (he was obliged to film his contribution to the earlier **Boccaccio 70** against his better judgment) and it is not inconceivable that he and Gianni de Venanzo audited **BLOOD AND BLACK LACE** to gauge the state of the art. (One also wonders if Fellini might have been razzing

Bava with the crack “Our zoom lens makes ideas like intimacy and secrecy obsolete”?) Fans of both Fellini and Bava no doubt enjoy seeing them share the same actors: **LISA AND THE DEVIL**’s Sylva Koscina is featured prominently in **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS**, while **ERIK THE CONQUEROR**’s Giorgio Ardisson, **BLOOD AND BLACK LACE**’s Lea Krugher and Mary Arden, and **ROY COLT AND WINCHESTER JACK**’s Marilu Tolò appear in eerily ornamental roles. (A deeper look into **JULIET**’s shadows also reveals the saturnine profile of Feodor Chaliapin, Jr., later the crippled architect of Dario Argento’s **INFERNO**.) Carlo Savina served as musical director for composer Nino Rota on **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** and went on to score Bava’s **LISA AND THE DEVIL**, while designer Piero Gherardi would provide Mario Bava’s **DANGER DIABOLIK** (1968) with its impressive futuristic gloss.

At the time of its Rome opening in October 1965, *Giulietta degli spiriti* clocked in at 150m—a length reduced by order of producer Rizzoli to 145m, then to 120m, and to 110m. For its American release, **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** appeared in versions running 148m (the running time of the November 3rd New York premiere) and 139m—it is the latter cut that is preserved on this excellent new addition to The Criterion Collection. Letterboxed at 1.85:1 (and anamorphically enhanced for even more supernatural widescreen playback), the new digital transfer (taken from a 35mm interpositive) betrays some film grain but otherwise makes for an astonishing viewing experience. The Technicolor materials are deeply saturated and vibrant, complimenting both

exterior scenes shot in the pine forests of Fregene (where Fellini had previously lensed **THE WHITE SHEIK** and *La dolce vita*) and the meticulously detailed art nouveau sets built on soundstages at Cinecittà. The Dolby-enhanced mono soundtrack (mastered from a 35mm magnetic audio track) is rendered in its original post-synched Italian, with optional English subtitles—no complaints there. Federico Fellini and Gianni di Venanzo will always be best known for their previous work together, but **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** is a fitting, and perhaps even prescient testimony to the end of good things.

Criterion has given **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** a reasonable 26 chapter stops, listed inside a fold-out booklet also graced by liner notes drawn from the 1993 biography written by Paris-based Fellini expert John Baxter. Presentation of the film is accompanied by a speckled, faded letterboxed trailer (2m 30s), which presents images from the film as a slide show of still frames. Also included is the short subject **FAMILIAR SPIRITS** (21m 26s). Filmed for the BBC on June 1, 1966, the featurette is hosted by Scottish playwright Ian Dallas (who had appeared as a ghoulish magician in *8½*) and features to-camera testimonials by actress Sandra Milo (whose effervescent Italian is translated in voiceover) and Fellini associate Guido Alberti (an industrialist and owner of a swank Via Veneto café). Appearing jocular and enthusiastic (in stark contrast to the concerns that would come close to killing him a year later), Fellini speaks in halting English of the creative process (“I haven’t the feeling to make a picture, but just to remake a

picture who... existed before in another dimension”), the “chromatic reality” of **JULIET OF THE SPIRITS** and his experiment with LSD. This B&W featurette has been given 6 chapters of its own, and is in reasonably good condition for a TV short shot on the cheap and forgotten for nearly 40 years. —Richard Harland Smith

NOTORIOUS

1946, *The Criterion Collection*, DD-1.0/MA/ST/+, \$39.95, 101m 18s, DVD-0

Though released in 1946, the history of **NOTORIOUS** dates back to 1939 when RKO head David O. Selznick pulled “Song of the Dragon” (a 1921 short story by John Taintor Foote) out of his idea file. Selznick saw the story—about a woman who sacrifices her morality when she becomes a spy in the home of a German terrorist—as a perfect vehicle for Vivien Leigh, whom Selznick also wanted to star in his first Alfred Hitchcock-directed production, **REBECCA** (as fate would have it, she wouldn’t appear in either production). But “Song of the Dragon” continued to sit on the back burner for years—the entire duration of America’s involvement in World War II, in fact—popping up in memos from time-to-time as a possible Hitchcock subject. After the success of **SPELLBOUND**, Selznick aggressively developed the project with Ingrid Bergman tapped for the lead role, even though the Swedish-born movie star was apprehensive about appearing in what could have easily become a propaganda picture. “But, after all, Mata Hari was a spy too,” she relented to Selznick, “and ‘Dragon’ is all right with me.”



Bergman had another incentive, of course: "My great love for Hitchcock has been expressed so often I don't need to repeat that." By the time the cameras rolled, Hitchcock and screenwriter Ben Hecht had only retained germinal ideas from Foote's tale (which went uncredited in the film), updating it to take timely advantage of the public's growing concern of post-war Nazis.

The film opens, as would **PSYCHO** years later, with an unnecessarily detailed orientation graphic superimposed over a cityscape: "Miami Florida, Three-Twenty P.M., April the Twenty-Fourth, Nineteen Hundred and Forty-Six." In the halls of a courthouse we find Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman), a young woman whose Nazi

father has just been sentenced to 20 years in prison for treason against the United States. Though she has a reputation for hard drinking and promiscuity, American Intelligence determines that Miss Huberman is a loyal enough citizen and, because of her past connections (and looseness), a prime candidate for recruitment. Enter debonair agent Devlin (Cary Grant), who makes an appearance at one of Alicia's all-night drinking parties and, after bailing her out of a drunken driving ticket, discloses his real intent. At first resistant to the idea of spying, Alicia finally agrees to join Devlin's agency, partly out of patriotism, mostly because she is falling in love with the handsome but emotionally guarded

man ("I'm afraid of women," he admits. "But I'll get over it.") Moments after arriving in Rio de Janeiro, Alicia is handed her first assignment: to win the affections of Alex Sebastian (Claude Rains), a respected member of Rio society and former friend of the Hubermans whose mansion has suddenly become a hotbed of activity involving German scientists. While Alicia hopes Devlin will somehow prevent her from taking the assignment, Devlin inwardly hopes that she will refuse—both stubbornly allow their senses of duty to supersede their true feelings for one another. Alicia finds Alex easy to seduce; in no time the beautiful spy is dining at his home, dodging icy stares from a suspicious mother (Leopoldine Konstantin)

and noting his entourage's nervous behavior around a seemingly ordinary bottle of wine. When the plan goes even better than expected and Alex proposes marriage, Devlin has one more opportunity to speak out against the operation, but instead he cynically agrees to it. With Alicia's romantic hopes of Devlin saving her dashed, she moves in to the Sebastians' home and, despite behind-the-door protestations from Madame Sebastian, is handed over the keys to the kingdom with one notable exception: the wine cellar. Only by orchestrating an elaborate party can Alicia sneak the key off Sebastian's ring and get Devlin into the house so that he can search the cellar, wherein an accidental breaking of a bottle reveals a dark metallic substance (it turns out to be uranium). Later, Alex discovers the missing key and after a troubled night of clue hunting, makes an Oedipal appearance in his mother's bedroom: "I'm married to an American spy," he admits to her in defeat. Afraid now for their own lives, if Alicia should be found out by the other Nazis, mother and son devise a plan to slowly kill the woman by poisoning her coffee. It works only too well: Alicia becomes sick so gradually that nobody suspects foul play. Only when she stops showing up at rendezvous points, does Devlin become concerned and, alone, decides to pay a nocturnal visit to the Sebastian home. But before he can save Alicia and proclaim his love to her he will have to face a house full of Nazis, the jealous Alex Sebastian, and a staircase that will either lead to freedom... or death.

Positioned between the director's defining British period and his creative boom of the

fifties, **NOTORIOUS** is nevertheless one of Alfred Hitchcock's most beloved films and the zenith of his accomplishments at RKO. Once dubbed the "quintessence of Hitchcock" by François Truffaut, it contains many of the master's most recognizable themes: the dressing up and manipulation of a woman by a man (in this case, a group of men: the FBI), the influence of a domineering mother, and the most quintessential of MacGuffins—but unlike other Hitchcock espionage thrillers (the earlier **THE 39 STEPS** and the later **NORTH BY NORTHWEST**), there is precious little humor. Hitchcock takes this romance deadly seriously, whether he's pushing the bounds of onscreen eroticism (Grant's and Bergman's balcony love scene contained the longest, most intimate, screen kiss up to that time) or with cinematographer Ted Tetzlaff casting shadows and diffusing light to perpetuate a sense of hopelessness in the main characters. Alicia's time in the Sebastian household has the feeling of a dark fairy tale. The architecture and ornamentation are almost suffocating in their richness—after all, this *is* a prison—and the elegant dress and manners of the Germans within can barely disguise their true reptilian natures. This conceit of deceptive *façades* is beautifully realized when Madame Sebastian (a wonderful performance by Leopoldine Konstantin, in her only American film) learns of Alicia's true identity and promptly lights a cigarette in the middle of her posh four-poster bed. Blowing away all politeness in a cloud of smoke, she finally reveals to us her own true identity as a thug. By the time Alicia lies in bed unable to pull out of her poison-induced

delirium, all the fairy tale roles and symbols have been established: we have a castle with a tower room, a secret in the dungeon, a tragic villain who can't win the heart of the one he loves, a wicked stepmother, and a heroic knight who can only revive this Sleeping Beauty by proclaiming his undying love.

The two suspense set pieces are masterful: Hitchcock opens the party sequence with an ambitious crane shot that starts high above the chandelier and ends on an extreme close-up of the key in Bergman's fidgeting hand; then, as the lovers embark on their search of the cellar, he screws the tension tighter and tighter by intercutting shots of the depleting champagne bottles that will at any moment send Sebastian down the stairs. The memorable finale finds Devlin, the drugged Alicia, Sebastian and his mother descending a staircase under the watchful gaze of several Nazis (they stand still on the checkered floor like grim chess pieces). Hitchcock assembles his "Odessa Steps" sequence out of numerous objective and subjective moving shots, all carefully orchestrated to move hypnotically at the same rate, with the duration of the descent agonizingly extended through editing. Hitchcock's art goes beyond simple blocking to offer a dreamlike passage for his characters, a limbo in the form of a staircase that may never end.

Hitchcock's technique is omnipresent, but it's the performances that matter most in **NOTORIOUS**. It may be clichéd to say that Ingrid Bergman's beauty is incandescent, but as seen through Hitchcock's and Tetzlaff's camera, there simply isn't a better word to describe it.

She also does an extraordinary job of handling her character's wild mood swings from girlish giddiness to profound sadness. Cary Grant, however, has the more difficult role. The actor has to suppress his natural comedic talents to play the emotionally distant (at times cruel) Devlin and somehow communicate intense inner feelings through a stone countenance. And Hitchcock comments on the character's aloofness through some of the most unorthodox framing and blocking of a Hollywood leading man (has any other star of Grant's stature spent more screen with his back to the camera?). In contrast, Claude Rains delivers a warm, sensitive, understated performance as the Nazi Sebastian. He injects his role with enough feeling and humanity that, at times, *we actually like him more than the hero*. Toying with hero-villain stereotypes, Hitchcock slyly asks us to ponder who is the worst monster: Sebastian, who is plotting terrorist acts against America but is kind and loving toward Alicia, or the American agents, who are ruthlessly exploiting a young woman and placing her in the gravest danger.

Anchor Bay Entertainment released a no-frills DVD of Alfred Hitchcock's **NOTORIOUS** back in 1999, but it's unlikely that any admirer of the film will be able to pass up the outstanding new Criterion Collection disc, which—like the company's recent editions of **THE 39 STEPS** [reviewed VW 73:38] and **REBECCA** [VW 85:60]—delivers a glorious new transfer and a wealth of interesting supplements. Windowboxed titles are followed by a fullframe presentation that varies somewhat in quality, but improves considerably over previous video

incarnations. Reel three appears rather grainy and dark, but most of the rest of the film is crisp and clear with details and textures superbly conveyed (Madame Sebastian's shimmering bedspread and other reflective objects and surfaces in Hitchcock's "glass" image system). The clarity of the image is most telling (in a most unflattering way) during rear projection shots. In the nighttime balcony scene, you can actually see the grain on the rear-projected image grow and diminish as Hitchcock's camera tracks forward and backward on the sound stage; and as Grant and Bergman struggle in the convertible, Grant's shadow is clearly visible on the projected scenery behind them.

Four audio tracks offer the film's mono soundtrack, two separate audio commentaries, and an isolated music & effects track. The commentaries have their moments, and we can certainly appreciate how infrequently information repeats between them, yet both wind up being disappointing for different reasons. "Hitchcock film scholar" Marion Keane has a somewhat unscholarly school-girl crush on the "gorgeous" Cary Grant and delivers a "film school" aesthetics lecture of the worst kind—condescending in tone, overly conscious of phallic symbols, and given to moments of amazing pseudo-intellectual claptrap. In the horse race sequence, as Bergman holds the binoculars up to her face, Keane launches into:

"Instead of her, we view the horse race in reflection. This image expresses both her inner nothingness and suggests to her the world she inhabits is at this moment... nothing. Moreover,

*the scene at the race projected onto her binoculars appears to be a film, and the binoculars appear to be a screen, interposed between our gaze and the images of **NOTORIOUS**. Thus, there is a way in which, like Alicia, we are viewing an image of nothing at this moment."*

This *is* a startling image in the film and worthy of comment, but it's much more likely that Hitchcock intended to: a) show that Alicia, in a heated moment, is hiding her emotions from Devlin and the spying Sebastian; and b) remind the audience (through another example of the film's "spy-glass" image system) that Alicia and Devlin are at this moment being spied upon by Sebastian. The projected film of the horse race on the binocular lenses is, just like the heavy use of rear projection in the film, another case of Hitchcock at play with technology to create his own unique brand of realism through artificial means. It isn't any more meaningful than the earlier scene in which Hitchcock projects a "reflection" of the motorcycle cop in Alicia's rear-view mirror.

Admittedly, film interpretation can be a very personal journey, so it's possible that some VW readers will appreciate Keane's more off-the-wall insights. But for those who abhor the pretentious (real or imagined), Rudy Behlmer—commentator for Universal's **THE INVISIBLE MAN** DVD and editor of **MEMO FROM DAVID O. SELZNICK**—offers an alternative meat-and-potatoes commentary balancing production history, actor profiles and on-the-set anecdotes. Reading heavily from Selznick's memos (not surprising, considering his

credentials), Behlmer edits together a fairly comprehensive overview, and only those who have more than a passing familiarity with Hitchcock will find some of his passages dull (for instance, the definition of MacGuffin and the "Bomb under the table" metaphor for suspense that we've all heard a hundred times). Occasionally, Behlmer comments on Hitchcock's art, and the differences between his and Keane's views couldn't be more pronounced. When a flustered Devlin leaves a bottle of champagne in fellow agent Prescott's office, Hitchcock ends the scene on a close-up of the bottle, and Behlmer—very conservatively—points out that the prop foreshadows the mysterious wine bottles of the second act; but to Keane, the bottle is an

obvious phallic symbol, and its abandonment alludes to Devlin's "emasculatation." Behlmer's essay may seem authoritative, but there is a troubling aspect to it: a casual perusal of published writings on Hitchcock reveals that parts of the commentary are copied without acknowledgement from the works of Donald Spoto and the late Christopher Palmer. It's expected that a commentator pulls from various sources, but for one to use another writer's words without acknowledgement leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

In terms of its sound, **NOTORIOUS** finds Hitchcock in a less experimental mode compared to later works or even the much earlier **THE 39 STEPS**. However, listening to the "isolated music & effects" track does reveal little

cherishable details, such as the cacophony of background laughter as Devlin tells Alicia that her father has committed suicide; the traffic cop's whistle that highlights Devlin's surprise when Prescott announces that Sebastian "was once in love with" Alicia; the sensuous sounds of crashing waves that supplants any need for background music during the prolonged balcony love scene; and the popping of a champagne cork that adds tension to the party sequence. The score is by longtime RKO staff composer Roy Webb, who worked on only one other Hitchcock film (**MR. AND MRS. SMITH**) and is perhaps better known for applying his subtle and mature approach to film scoring to the restrained horror thrillers of Val Lewton throughout the 1940s. Webb

Ingrid Bergman, torn between the equally gray extremes of Cary Grant and Claude Rains, gives one of the great performances of her career in Hitchcock's NOTORIOUS.



provides **NOTORIOUS** with a memorably melodic love theme that is treated to variations ranging from tender and romantic to fractured and dissonant; many times it helps convey the feelings of Grant's character to an audience that might have otherwise been extremely put off by the actor's stone coldness. Typical of Webb, music is utilized sparingly. Following the main title, the first cue doesn't arrive until 15m in, and for the bulk of the first half, most cues form bridges between scenes and simply add ethnic colorization to the Rio setting. But as the drama heats up, so does Webb's score as it masterfully adds tension and underlying emotion to the wordless sequence of Sebastian moving about the house and uncovering clues to Alicia's treachery. Due to the age of the recording, sonics are limited and occasionally there is serious deterioration that causes the music to warble—an effect only noticeable on the isolated music & effects track.

Inside Criterion's supplemental "Dossier," there are a number of interesting items, starting with excerpts from "Song of the Dragon" (the similarities are marked; surely, in this day and age, Foote would have been credited), adorned with the original SATURDAY EVENING POST illustrations. "Production Correspondence" contains memos to and from Selznick (one to story editor Val Lewton), with the most interesting item being a letter to the imperious executive producer from J. Edgar Hoover, whose demands for all references to the FBI being eliminated led to the film's vagueness regarding Devlin's group's identity. Some of the memos are also read aloud by Rudy Behlmer in his audio

commentary, but it's nice to have them all collected here for easy access.

Other features include a still gallery with many priceless publicity images (Hitch and Grant facing each other in profile silhouette); an explanation of rear projection, followed by examples from the film; deleted scenes pieced together with script pages and photos (all of them but one late scene between Devlin and Prescott would have been superfluous); and a selection of script pages for alternate endings that proves both fascinating and hilarious. Many of the endings involve shootouts: Mother shoots Devlin, Alex shoots Mother, Mother shoots Alex... *ad nauseum*. Hitchcock's final choice was the right one.

"The Fate of the Unica Key," narrated by Marion Keane over production stills, is a rather gratuitous extra since both Keane and Behlmer tell the story in their audio commentaries. A recounting of events from AFI's 1979 tribute to Hitchcock, Keane waxes poetically over host Ingrid Bergman's unrehearsed presentation to Hitch of a certain good luck talisman—the original prop key from **NOTORIOUS**—in the hopes that it would bring *him* good luck in the future. While Keane's telling is nearly bursting with ardor, Behlmer rather unromantically informs us that Bergman hesitated at the podium when she first pulled out the key and that later, through the mail, she sent Hitchcock the *real* key with an apology!

A selection of trailers rounds off this very nice package. The full theatrical trailer is pretty standard stuff for the time, but the teasers are jaw-droppingly tasteless in their zeal to get the blood pumping. Imagine the

voice of a carnival barker screaming: "Gems in her hair, ice in her heart... she was a notorious woman of affairs! All she was was all he wanted! No-torious! No-torious! NO-TORIOUS!" —Bill Cooke

THE OTHERS

Los Otros

2001, Dimension Home Video, DD-5.1/SS/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+, \$29.98, 104m 4s, DVD-1

THESIS

Tesis

1995, Vanguard Films, DD-2.0/LB/ST/+, \$29.98, 118m 39s, DVD-1

Of all the ghost films released in 2001, **THE OTHERS** seemed *least* likely to break the bank. Despite the star wattage of Nicole Kidman, Alejandro Amenábar's first English language feature boasted no sex, no flashy special effects, and no pop hits for the OST—in short, none of the perks of John Carpenter's **GHOSTS OF MARS**, Steve Beck's **THIRTEEN GHOSTS**, Ernest Dickerson's **BONES**, or even of David Lynch's critically-lauded **MULHOLLAND DR.** Yet the modestly budgeted (\$17 million) **THE OTHERS** made more money than those other films combined, with receipts totaling nearly \$100 million by year's end. Most of that profit was made in the anxious weeks following 9-11, when nobody in Hollywood would have guessed that Americans would fill movie houses to see (and see again) a somber, spooky meditation on anguish, isolation and denial. That's life for you.

Often compared (not unreasonably) to M. Night Shyamalan's **THE SIXTH SENSE**, Amenábar's **THE OTHERS** bears more of a



Nicole Kidman consoles her fretful son James Bentley
in Alejandro Amenábar's outstanding ghost story, *THE OTHERS*.

resemblance to Kevin Billington's obscure 1973 ghost story **VOICES**, in which grieving parents Gayle Hunnicutt and David Hemmings find their mourning thwarted by preternatural visitations in a fogbound mansion. Set on the island of Jersey (closer to France than England, and occupied during WWII by the Nazis), **THE OTHERS** lays its action in the autumn of 1945, as agitated matriarch Grace Stewart (Kidman) awaits the return of her soldier husband while caring for daughter Anne (Alakina Mann) and son Nicholas (James Bentley), victims of a potentially lethal allergy to sunlight. Abandoned by her house staff, Grace places a notice for live-in help, a call answered by the charmingly Old World Mrs. Mills (Fionnula Flanagan), taciturn groundskeeper Tuttle (**THEATRE OF BLOOD**'s Eric Sykes) and mute chambermaid Lydia (Elaine Cassidy). As the new servants learn how to protect the children (a daily ritual involving the

shrouding of windows and maintaining locked doors to contain the darkness), Grace is alarmed by Anne's belief in the existence of an imaginary friend she calls Victor. When she also experiences odd sounds (a child sobbing) and sights (locked doors that open inexplicably), Grace organizes a search of the house to determine whether it has been invaded by unknown persons from without or from within by "something diabolic, something... not at rest."

Although **THE OTHERS** won more than its fair share of affirmative blurbs, it was snubbed by the FILM COMMENT crowd (of 21 critics polled, only two included it in their Top 10 lists for the year, with the rest preferring that *other* Nicole Kidman starrer, Baz Luhrmann's postmodern party fave **MOULIN ROUGE**). This comes as no surprise; **THE OTHERS** is defiantly old-fashioned and nowhere near as cool as **MENTO** or **GHOST WORLD** (two critical darlings that traded in

alienation and ennui without resorting to genre parlor tricks). Funereal to the nth degree, **THE OTHERS** is (to crib a line from Amenábar's feature film debut, **THESIS**) a Godsend for the morbid. Like the haunted protagonists of Jack Clayton's **THE INNOCENTS** (1961) and Guillermo del Toro's **THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE** (2001), Kidman's resolute but brittle Grace is asea in the limbo between her spiritual catechism and dire metaphysical uncertainty. When asked by the precocious Anne whether men who die in war can go to Heaven, the best Grace can offer is "It depends." Grace's sin is not that she lacks answers but that her pretense of having them bequeaths to her children her essential uncertainty. Grace's refusal to surrender, to quit her "damned island," comes to symbolize a societal self-blindness. For Amenábar, an artist whelped in restrictive Spain, the Gothic milieu of Grace's bunker-like existence

is an apt metaphor for containment, protecting a world where silence and darkness are prized, but where the admission of light “changes everything.”

It is to the shared credit of writer-director-composer Amenábar, cinematographer Javier Aguirresarobe (who shot Basque filmmaker Julio Medem’s bucolic and otherworldly *Tierra*) and a talented ensemble cast that **THE OTHERS** feels like a symphony rather than a chamber piece. (Special mention should go to James Bentley, whose wee Nicholas goes about with his forehead puckered in perpetual perplexity.) Amenábar keeps the suspense boiling through adroit manipulation of image (one eerie shot of three baleful faces peering in through a dusty window recalls a similar tableau from Mario Bava’s **BLACK SABBATH**) and sound (every turn of a key in a lock sounds like a slap across the face) and stages more gasp-worthy frights per act than any horror film in recent memory. Some viewers may grumble at the ease with which they may suss out the film’s big revelation in advance of the final curtain, but that’s the point. That Grace is the last to know has everything to do with the fact that **THE OTHERS** is not a mystery, but a tragedy. Cast on the strength of her bipolar turn in Gus van Sant’s **TOO DIE FOR** (1995), Nicole Kidman delivers another delicately stylized performance of mounting fragility, the young-old quality of her stingy good looks perfectly offset by the old-young earthiness of veteran actress Fionnula Flanagan. Midway through the film, Christopher Eccleston (the supine storyteller of Danny Boyle’s **SHALLOW GRAVE**) turns up as Grace’s errant husband, and Renée

Asherson (briefly glimpsed in Hammer’s **RASPUTIN, THE MAD MONK**) is unforgettable as—well, you’ll see, you’ll see.

A handsome film when seen in the cinema, **THE OTHERS** loses little in its translation to the small screen. This perfectly-authored two-disc set preserves the feature itself on Disc 1; letterboxed at 1.80:1 (16:9 enhanced), the image is clear and the subdued colors true and textured. The splendidly dimensional 5.1 Dolby Digital sound mix is perfectly balanced between whisper-quiet effects (noises off, Chinese whispers, and the melancholy tinkling of a piano in an empty room) and nerve-shattering spikes of sudden sound. A French language track and both English and Spanish subtitles are also provided. The film has been given 19 chapters.

Extras on Disc 2 consist of a fullframe trailer (2m 29s), an 88 shot stills gallery laid out like the film’s antique photo album of the dead, a 4m 29s demo of the film’s subtle use of layered digital imagery, chroma key and rotoscoping, and a charitable and engrossing 8m 55s sidebar on the real life medical condition Xeroderma Pigmentosum (which affects only about 1,000 people worldwide), focusing on the case of the Mahar family of Poughkeepsie, New York. An “Intimate Look at Director Alejandro Amenábar (8m 13s) is a collection of behind-the-scenes clips presented without commentary, effectively an appetizer for “A Look Inside **THE OTHERS**” (21m 53s). This studio-produced puff piece of talking heads (Amenábar, Kidman, Flanagan, producer Sunmin Park and executive producers Tom Cruise and Paula Wagner) and behind-the-scenes footage offers

very little useful information; it’s a pleasant enough extra, but one that need be seen only once—*after* you have watched the main feature, please, as it will spoil some key scenes for you otherwise. All of this bonus material could easily have been shoe-horned onto one disc, but Dimension wisely kept the feature and the bonuses separate, to maintain the higher bit rate that **THE OTHERS** so richly deserves.

Crises of self-perception have always been integral to Alejandro Amenábar’s narrative journeys of discovery and dread. American audiences are by now familiar with his intentionally confounding *Abre los ojos* (US: **OPEN YOUR EYES**, 1999), thanks to **VANILLA SKY**, its flashy Hollywood remake starring Tom Cruise (who executive produced **THE OTHERS** for ex-wife Nicole Kidman). The self-delusion central to **OPEN YOUR EYES** haunts the lonely characters who people Amenábar’s feature film debut, **THESIS**. Ana Torrent stars as cinema studies student Ángela Márquez, in the midst of preparing her thesis on “Audiovisual Violence and the Family.” When her advisor (**99.9**’s Miguel Picazo) dies while watching a video she requested for her project, Ángela confiscates the cassette—which shows the torture, murder and dismemberment of Vanessa Romero (Olga Margallo), a student who disappeared from campus two years earlier. Teaming up with Chema (Fele Martínez), a fellow classmate and collector of *mondo* and pornographic films, Ángela initially suspects the handsome Bosco Herranz (Eduardo Noriega, later the hunky heavy of **THE DEVIL’S BACKBONE**), who knew the missing girl and owns the very type of digital camera used to



Ana Torrent stars as a film student whose studies expose her to an underground of snuff filmmaking in Amenábar's gripping directorial debut, *THESIS*.

record her murder—until Bosco's estranged girlfriend Yolande (Rosa Campillo) informs her that the reclusive and volatile Chema had expressed a pointed interest in the making of "snuff" films shortly before Vanessa's disappearance.

In its paranoia, **THESIS** recalls such hospital thrillers as **COMA**, **NIGHTWATCH** [reviewed VW 75:17] and **ANATOMY** [VW 78:70], but anticipates plot points and stylistic flourishes from **SCREAM** [VW 41:16], **LOST HIGHWAY** [VW 43:26] and Hideo Nakata's **RING** (the latest beneficiary of a Hollywood remake). While Anthony Waller's **MUTE WITNESS** [VW 33:19] began in the act of snuff filmmaking, **THESIS** kicks off after Vanessa's murder has been recorded on tape, a dimensional transfer converting a human act to a commercial one. "The cinema is an industry," proclaims Ángela's dynamic new advisor (Xabier Elorriaga), who recommends she

follow the American example and "give the public what it wants." Considering the distribution difficulties of Spain's homegrown product (when informed that Ángela's advisor died watching a film, Chema cracks "I bet it was Spanish"), Amenábar's allusion to the supply and demand of the Industrial Revolution is hardly gratuitous. Images of mechanical prowess were among the first preserved on film and Vanessa's dismemberment echoes the fate of *fin de siècle* factory workers snagged in the cogs of progress. Rather than target the media for complicity in violence-as-spectacle, Amenábar implicates anyone who feeds vicariously off the suffering of others to achieve a kind of extreme intimacy, which elevates **THESIS** above the accusatory level Paul Schrader's **HARDCORE** (1979) or Joel Schumacher's **8MM** (1999).

One of Thomas Edison's earliest Kinetoscopes was **THE EXECUTION OF MARY QUEEN OF**

SCOTS (1895), whose brevity and single-mindedness may qualify it as the grandmother of all snuff films (real or fabricated). Monty Python's Flying Circus milked the comic possibilities of the same historic event as a *radio* play (in which the imprisoned Mary Stuart is inefficiently clubbed to death over several installments). A violent act whose aural accompaniment is all the more horrifying for the visuals it evokes gets more sober consideration in **THESIS**, when Ángela, afraid to view the snuff film, darkens the image on her TV so she can at least hear it. It's a deliriously disturbing moment and the film never comes close to topping it, detouring instead to American-style suspense setpieces à la **JAGGED EDGE** or **BASIC INSTINCT** (both written by Joe Eszterhas). Amenábar pits his tortured heroine between suspects and potential lovers, finally condescending to an Eszterhasian seduction scene

set in a pulsing discothèque. Even burdened with these disappointing asides, **THESIS** remains a worthwhile and affecting thriller. As the conflicted Ángela (whose isolation recalls Mimsy Farmer's character in Armando Crispino's **AUTOPSY**), Ana Torrent was very likely cast for her association as the **FRANKENSTEIN**-obsessed little girl in Victor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (US: **SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE**, 1973), which depicted Franco's Spain as a stumbling, inarticulate creature, absent of memory and crudely assembled from the bodies of the dead.

It's either an outrage or oddly appropriate that **THESIS** looks on this DVD from Vanguard Films no better than a bootleg tape. The image is grainy, colors are drab, and contrasts are only fair—all of which makes it difficult to assess the work of cinematographer Hans Bürman (a second unit director on Sergio Sollima's **THE MERCENARY**, Bürman later shot the Umberto Lenzi zombiefest **NIGHTMARE CITY**). While some online sources claim an aspect ratio of either 1.33:1 or 1.66:1, the picture measures out at approximately 1.85:1, which feels right. The 2.0 mono sound is surprisingly effective in balancing dialogue with subtle ambient sound effects and the evocative score (composed also by Amenábar). There are 12 chapters. Although Vanguard's kepcase cites the name of the film as **THESIS**, both the actual disc and the film itself carry the Spanish title. The film's running time is listed as 121m, but the disc clocks in at just over 118m, a discrepancy likely due to a PAL-to-NTSC conversion. English subtitles are non-removable and the translation is occasionally haphazard (Ángela is chided by

Chema for being "screamish") and prone to such Britishisms as "bloke" and "git."

Extras consist of poor quality letterboxed trailers for **THESIS** (1m 36s), Julio Medem's *Tierra* (1m 14s) and **SECRETS OF THE HEART** (1m 14s). The English translation in the preview for **THESIS** actually seems superior than that in the film; in the trailer, Angela asks Chema, "Have you ever seen a dead body?" while in the film the line "Have you ever seen anyone killed?" carries less of a visceral charge. A making-of featurette (22m 17s) rounds out the meager supplements, but provides an interesting look behind the scenes (where an exacting Amenábar torments Torrent by making her re-do again and again her delivery of the line "¿Que?"), with comments from the director, his leading lady, co-stars Noriega and Martinez, DP Bürman, and producer José Luis Cuerda; a director in his own right, Cuerda makes a brief appearance in **THESIS** as a film professor who begs his students, "Please go to the cinema." The director and actor filmographies promised on the packaging of this "Special Edition" never materialize. —Richard Harland Smith

TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE: THE MOVIE

1990, Paramount Home Video, DD-5.1/SS/MA/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+, \$24.99, 93m 10s, DVD-1

The third anthology film from Richard B. Rubinstein's Laurel Entertainment (after **CREEPSHOW** and **CREEPSHOW 2**) took the name of Laurel's well-received syndicated television series and applied it to a trio of tales from well-known authors.

Confident direction, excellent effects and a providential combination of present and future star power then brought the concoction to life in a most winning manner. **TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE: THE MOVIE** now makes its widescreen debut on home video, taking full advantage of the DVD format.

In the framing story, Betty (Deborah Harry, formerly of Blondie and **VIDEODROME**) looks like any happy suburban homemaker to her unsuspecting neighbors, but behind closed doors, she's preparing to cook young Timmy (Matthew Lawrence, brother to teen heartthrob Joey) for dinner. As Betty ponders the appropriate baking time and temperature, her dinner-to-be attempts to postpone his upcoming evisceration à la Scheherezade, by reading stories from her favorite book aloud.

In "Lot 249," an update (by Michael McDowell) of an obscure Arthur Conan Doyle tale, Christian Slater is Andy, the bitter rival of fellow college student Edward Bellingham (Steve Buscemi). With the help of his sister Susan (Julianne Moore), Andy had ruined Edward's chances of winning a prestigious prize—but Edward may soon be back on top of the game with his acquisition of Lot 249: an ancient mummy (Mike Deak). Edward happily demonstrates his knowledge of mummification techniques to Andy and his friend Lee (Robert Sedgwick), but what he doesn't tell them is that he also has the scroll that can bring the mummy to homicidal life... Director John Harrison gets the most from the actors and the effects department (the KNB group) here—this is a well-played, briskly-paced melodrama featuring grisly shocks,



*Julianne Moore (as Susan) and Robert Sedgwick (as Lee)
from the "Lot 249" segment of TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE: THE MOVIE.*

an unexpected twist or two, and a satisfying stinger. Harrison, a former soundtrack composer for George A. Romero (**DAY OF THE DEAD**) is joined on the commentary track of this DVD by Romero himself. As they watch "Lot 249," the remarkable cast gets plenty of attention. Slater was already fairly well-known at that time, but Romero and Harrison can't quite recall which episode of TV's **DARKSIDE** featured him as a child actor. (It was "A Case of the Stubborns," starring Eddie Bracken.) The commentators also speculate that this might have been Buscemi's first film. While that's not even close, this was indeed, Moore's screen debut. On a sadder note, we're told that Ralph Marrero ("Rickles" in **DAY OF THE DEAD**), who appears as a cabbie here, died soon afterwards in an auto accident.

By 1990, Romero was no longer affiliated with Laurel Entertainment. However, Richard Rubinstein (who produced this film with Mitchell Galin) retained

the rights to "Cat From Hell," a Romero-scripted adaptation of a Stephen King short story originally intended to be part of **CREEPSHOW 2**. By bringing it out for **DARKSIDE**, he was able to promote the names "George A. Romero" and "Stephen King" on a project that neither man actually worked on (though, in fairness, neither suffered any embarrassment over the finished product, either). Professional hit man Halston (David Johansen—who, like Harry with Blondie, formerly fronted a seminal punk band: The New York Dolls) is called upon to perform a service for Drogan, a wealthy, wheelchair-bound pharmaceuticals tycoon (William Hickey). Halston is, by turns, confused and amused to find that his target is an ordinary-looking black cat. But Drogan warns him not to take the assignment lightly; the cat (possibly in retaliation for Drogan's extensive animal testing activities) has already brought about the demises of the other

holders of the Drogan legacy. Who'll be left standing when Drogan returns home? For this story, Harrison utilizes an imaginative combination of stage and screen techniques. Scrims and special lighting turn indoor conversations into outdoor flashbacks within a single shot, while prowling POV camerawork suggests the presence of the cat as effectively as either the KNB puppetry or the sight of the actual animal. Hickey is as creepy as one might suspect, and Johansen's one-man showdown builds to a memorable payoff. Perhaps to the disappointment of some fans, Romero politely avoids dishing any dirt on Rubinstein, the circumstances behind the use of this script, or the now-dissolved Laurel Entertainment: the commentary here consists mainly of details of technique and compliments exchanged between the two participants.

The Michael McDowell-scripted "Lover's Vow" gives us

James Remar as Preston, a down-on-his-luck big city artist. His inspiration has faded, his money has run out, his work isn't selling, and his agent Wyatt (Robert Klein) has abandoned him. On the brink of despair, Preston gains a new appreciation of life when a monstrous, winged gargoyle appears from nowhere to rip the head from the shoulders of Preston's bartender! Anxious to avoid such a fate himself, Preston readily agrees when the creature offers him a reprieve—on the condition that he never, ever tell anyone else about what he's just seen. From then on, Preston's life not only continues—it improves dramatically. A chance meeting with the vulnerable young Carola (Rae Dawn Chong) leads to romance, and the return of Preston's inspiration brings about renewed success, allowing marriage and family to follow. What could possibly go wrong? In the commentary, Harrison alludes to the existence of a Japanese legend involving a snow witch; and this is the closest anyone comes to invoking the name of Lafcadio Hearn, whose **KWAIDAN** story was rather blatantly adapted here. Credit where credit was due would have been appropriate, but this remains a skillful, emotional transplantation of the theme, nonetheless, with the sensitive performances of the two leads being every bit as crucial to the effect as the monstrous visuals (KNB saved the most spectacular for last). Here, Harrison relates how the casting of "Jamie" Remar and Chong had nothing to do with a "mixed marriage" theme (an issue he specifically refused to raise)—the performers already happened to know and like each other and wanted to work together.

Finally, the wraparound story concludes as Timmy attempts to escape his predicament by



The KNB Special Makeup Effects team provide a nifty gargoyle to the TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE: THE MOVIE segment, "Lover's Vow."

improvising a story of his own, bringing things to a fittingly dark-humored end.

Given the hit-and-miss nature of the anthology format, the consistent quality of **DARKSIDE** makes it a standout, and its high quality is shared by the Paramount DVD. The 1.77:1, anamorphically enhanced image is greatly improved over the old VHS release, and the format allowed Harrison (who also provided the score for "Lover's Vow") to indulge in a 5.1 Dolby Digital Surround soundtrack remix while keeping the original stereo mix available as an option. A French-language mono track is offered, as well. The optional English subtitles do justice to the dialogue, while the only extra, aside from the Harrison/Romero commentary, is the theatrical trailer (1m 56s, which contains some spoilers). The diverse elements that made this film a theatrical success in 1990 hold up just as well today. —Shane M. Dallmann

TWICE TOLD TALES

1963, MGM Home Entertainment, DD-2.0/LB/CC, \$14.95, 119m 45s, DVD-1

Though AIP had a lock on the profitable teaming of star Vincent Price, director Roger Corman and source author Edgar Allan Poe in the early 1960s, rival outfits sought to horn in on the profits of the series Corman began with **THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER** (1960). Consequently, there was a rash of low-budget non-AIP Price vehicles based on public domain sources, including Thomas de Quincey (**CONFESSIONS OF AN OPIUM EATER**), Shakespeare (**TOWER OF LONDON**) and Guy de Maupassant (**DIARY OF A MAD-MAN**). For their stab at Corman-style Price horror, United Artists selected Nathaniel Hawthorne, an American writer who was among the few contemporaries Poe himself admired. **TWICE-TOLD TALES**, like Corman's

TALES OF TERROR, is a triple-decker effort (sub-titled "A Trio of Terror") affording the star a shot at three different roles: its sources are the familiar short stories "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" (the only element here that derives from the Hawthorne collection that gives the film its title) and "Rappacini's Daughter" (originally in the collection *MOSES FROM THE MANSE*) and the novel *THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES* (more elaborately filmed in 1939, with Price in a supporting role). Thirty-five minutes longer than **TALES OF TERROR** (1962) and sorely lacking the dynamic pacing, sly humor or gothic verve of the Corman-Poe films, **TWICE-TOLD TALES** has never been anyone's favorite Price credit. The relatively sumptuous presentation of this release spotlights a few features of interest, but also exposes many flaws.

The regulation linking narration, delivered lugubriously by Price, is read over snippets of a clean skeleton hand opening a big book. "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" is an intimate piece, as wordily-scripted as an old-time radio adaptation, in which aged friends Carl Heidegger (**THE TIME MACHINE**'s Sebastian Cabot) and Alex Medbourne (Price) discover that a liquid seeping into the crypt of the woman who died 38 years previously on the eve of her marriage to Carl has miraculous powers, having kept Sylvia (**SHE DEVIL**'s Mari Blanchard) fresh in her coffin. Doses of the "virgin spring" restore Carl and Alex to vigorous youth (represented as healthy middle-age) and bring Sylvia back to life. The punchline is in the spirit of "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," as dramatized in **TALES OF TERROR**, but

Hawthorne is less concerned than Poe with sudden putrefactions, concentrating on Heidegger's disillusionments as the rejuvenation potion forces him to realize that the loves he has cherished all these years are worthless.

"Rappacini's Daughter" is set in Padua, where student Giovanni (**RETURN OF THE FLY**'s Brett Halsey) is smitten with Beatrice (**ATLANTIS THE LOST CONTINENT**'s Joyce Taylor), who is kept secluded in a garden with a purple thistle which her scientist father (Price) has bred to be virulently poisonous. Haunted by his wife's faithlessness, Rappacini has also made his own daughter poisonous so no sin can touch her, but his attempt to moderate the curse by allowing her a relationship with Giovanni leads to another disaster, with dead principles scattered around the garden.

Though based on a novel rather than a short story, "The House of the Seven Gables" is not accorded much more running time than the other episodes; as a consequence, it is a severe pruning of the original (the role Price played in 1939 is omitted entirely), owing as much to Corman's **HOUSE OF USHER** as to Hawthorne, that still somehow manages to seem draggy. Wastrel Gerald Pyncheon (Price), scion of a New England family whose fortune was founded by unjustly accusing blacksmith Matthew Maule of witchcraft, returns to the eponymous edifice with his young but estranged wife Alice (**IT CONQUERED THE WORLD**'s Beverly Garland), unwelcomed by his embittered sister (**THE LEOPARD MAN**'s Jacqueline De Wit). Though male Pyncheons live in terror of

Maule's curse, that they shall all die with blood on their lips, Gerald is intent on finding a deed hidden in the house which will restore his fortunes, though the only living soul who might know the secret is Matthew's descendant Jonathan (**THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED**'s Richard Denning). Alice turns out to be semi-possessed by an ancestress who was in love with Matthew, and supernatural events (a floating locket, an undrying bloodstain) point the way to a low-rent finish involving Poe elements like burial alive, soricide, a strangling skeleton hand and the collapse on Price's head of (a very bad miniature) of the cursed house as the lovers escape.

Directed at a plod by Sidney Salkow (**THE LAST MAN ON EARTH**) and written by producer Robert E. Kent, **TWICE-TOLD TALES** is disappointingly tame given the material. Unlike Poe, who gifted Corman with situations, Hawthorne was a plot man: all three tales here have intricate backstories that are conveyed clumsily, while the personal passions and guilts (including Hawthorne's embarrassment that an ancestor of his was the Pyncheon-like judge who condemned the Salem witches) are invested with no particular meaning. Professionals like Cabot, Abraham Sofaer and Denning match Price for solidly uninspired line readings, but only Garland—who expressed disappointment that Corman didn't cast her in any of his Poe pictures and might have seen this as a chance to make up for the missed opportunity—delivers anything like a rounded, involving performance. Price, not on his best day, underplays all three of his roles, but makes an effort to be different in each tale, investing Rappacini



Glenn Saxson stars as Max Bunker's cutthroat anti-hero in Umberto Lenzi's *KRIMINAL*.

with a certain well-intentioned insanity while making Medbourne and Pyncheon respectively a pious murdering hypocrite and a grasping murdering hypocrite. Shot on a few cramped sets, without the eye-deceiving skills of a Daniel Haller or Floyd Crosby to make anything of them, this is a drab effort, the only striking visual touches being with only the purple poisons of "Rappacini's Daughter" and the ludicrously scarlet bloodstains of "Seven Gables." The rejuvenation or transformation effects are well-enough done, though a scene in which Price achieves the miracle of transforming a live white guinea pig into a dead purple one is liable to provoke an unsought laugh in a film that could do with a streak of black humor.

MGM's "Midnite Movies" DVD is letterboxed to approximately 1.66:1, given 16 chapter stops and offers optional French and Spanish subtitles. The print looks much better than previous pan-&-scan TV versions or video releases, which occasionally brings out a highlight but mostly serves to reveal

lack of inspiration in lighting, camerawork and art direction. The only extra is a Paul Frees-narrated trailer that labels Price "that personification of all evil on the screen." —Kim Newman

Imports

KRIMINAL

aka *La Mascara de Kriminal*

"The Mask of Kriminal"

1966, Pulp Video #DSP05R427, DD-5.1 or 2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$29.95, 95m 10s, DVD-0 (PAL)

IL MARCHIO DI KRIMINAL

"The Mark of Kriminal"

aka *Los Quatros Budas de*

Kriminal, Le Retour de Kriminal

1967, Pulp Video #DSPO5R428, DD-5.1 or 2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$29.95, 85m 38s, DVD-0 (PAL)

One of the most prolific pulp imaginations to emerge from Italy is that of Max Bunker (real name: Luciano Secchi), a still-active Milanese comics writer and mogul who has created

numerous, enduring characters for the *fumetti* published by his own company, in addition to various fiction and film projects—including the 1982 thriller *Delitti, amore e gelosia* ("Death, Love and Jealousy"). Though his entrance into the comics business predated that of DIABOLIK creators Luciana and Angela Giussani (also Milanese), Bunker followed their lead in the 1960s when he added two anti-heroes to his comics roster: Satanik and Kriminal, both of whom beat Diabolik in the race to the big screen. While the former would wait until 1968 for her screen debut in Piero Vivarelli's lackluster *Satanik* (1968), Kriminal—an elitist "genius of crime" who transgresses only against other, less careful, and therefore less worthy criminals—first went before the cameras shortly before ABC-TV's BATMAN took maskedman-mania global in the fall of 1966.

Kriminal begins à la Fantômas with the eponymous master criminal ("Glenn Saxson," aka Dutch actor Roel Bos)—sentenced to death for

stealing the unrecovered Crown of England—escaping the gallows. Everyone is shocked by his audacious exit except Scotland Yard's Inspector Milton (Andrea Bosic), who arranged for the rope to break so that the fugitive could be followed back to the stolen corona. After vaulting the gate at Buckingham Palace, Kriminal eludes his flat-footed pursuers and sends the crown to Milton with thanks for being the best accomplice he ever had. Kriminal finds a night's sanctuary in the bed of his former girlfriend, Margie (Susan Baker), now engaged to the stuffy son of millionairess Lady Gold (Esmeralda Ruspoli), the silver-haired head of the company where Margie works as a secretary. Margie's pillow talk alerts Kriminal to Lady Gold's plan to have a cachet of diamonds, insured by Lloyds of London for £5,000,000, carried out of the country for her by her trusted associate Inge (Helga Liné), working in tandem with a lookalike decoy named Trude (also Liné). After drugging Inge at the airport and finding her valise empty, Kriminal intuits that Lady Gold was working with Trude on a scheme that would land her the jewels *and* the insurance premium; but Lady Gold is destined to die, not realizing that Trude had a plan of her own, to split the wealth not with her, but with Inge—her real life sister and identical twin.

Those familiar with the films of director Umberto Lenzi, which seldom overreach the average, may be surprised by the style and production value evident throughout **Kriminal**. Like the Bunker comics, the script is derivative (mostly of Fantômas and James Bond), but it remains very pleasant viewing for its ambitious action scenes,

scenic international locations (it hops from London to Madrid, the Côte d'Azur, and Istanbul), and of course, a protagonist who moonlights in skeleton tights. Top-lined "Glenn Saxson" is simply too fresh-faced and inexperienced to bring the necessary dimensions of sophistication, cunning and menace to Kriminal; "wily" is about the best he can do. Happily, the supporting cast offers many points of interest: a beautifully bronzed and brunette Helga Liné (actually, two of her), a bikini cameo (and surprise reappearance) by a minxish Mary Arden (**BLOOD AND BLACK LACE**), the worthy third act villainy of Ivano Staccioli, and a surprise walk-on by Dario Argento's favorite cabbie, Fulvio Mingozzi, as the warden who escorts Kriminal to the gallows. The music is credited to Raymond Full and Roberto Pregadio, and is plainly divided between musical "commentary" stings and replies, and a far more interesting brand of cool bop. This musical orientation, along with its Ford Fairlane convertibles, thick swimsuits, skinny neckties, and below-the-knee skirts, often make **Kriminal** look more like a 1960-62 film than a creation of its own progressive times, but cameraman Angelo Lotti stops the show once or twice to present images of timeless inspiration—as when we see a vague figure swimming at the bottom of a night-dark pool, its surface scattered with many varieties of flowers, emerging from the opposite end in the skeleton suit of Kriminal.

Kriminal was never given an American release, but those who are familiar with it through fuzzy, cropped Spanish language dupes will be very pleasantly surprised by Pulp Video's "Cult

Collection" DVD. The full anamorphic image, measuring 2.33:1, is consistently inviting and frequently striking, with golden/tawny fleshtones and a generally bright palette. We noticed some modest tiling in the rare shots with heavy black shadows, but the night photography generally manages to keep grain at bay. The language barrier remains intact as ever, with the film presented in Italian with (removable) Italian subtitles only, but the audio has been refreshed with a gratifying Dolby 5.1 remix, which adds greatly to its sparkle; the audio can also be played in its original 2.0 mono. The film has been given a dozen chapter marks, and there are bonus chapters of a Lenzi filmography and reprinted liner notes (uncredited), which point out that the finale of the film—which abruptly segues from live action into a series of illustrated *fumetti*, as if the picture ran out of funding—was copied many years later by George A. Romero's **CREEPSHOW** (1983).

Eight months after the release of **Kriminal**, Saxson, Bosic and Liné were reunited in **Il marchio di Kriminal**, the second and final series entry, and a noticeable improvement on the first. Replacing Lenzi this time around is Fernando Cerchio—a director experienced in historical dramas (**NEFERTITI QUEEN OF THE NILE**), pirate films (**THE RED SHIEK**) and comedies (**Totò contro Maciste**)—whose past experience in flamboyant spectacle and intrigue serves this subject well. Saxson wears his role more comfortably here, and Liné sports an eye-popping wardrobe that runs the gamut from a flamenco dress to hot pants, but most importantly, the script (by Edmondo M. Brochero) is richer in circumstance and process. Set



Mary Arden turns the tables on an unmasked Glenn Saxson in *KRIMINAL*.

again in London, one year after the previous events (we see 1966's **CAST A GIANT SHADOW** on a marquee in an establishing shot of Piccadilly Circus), the story opens with Kriminal accidentally frightening to death the elderly Ethel Smith while burglarizing the estate of Lady Hamilton, now a shelter for widowed women. His girlfriend Janet (Evi Rigano) works there, and while conferring with her, they accidentally break a blue Buddha, which Lady Hamilton acquired many years earlier from a shop in Green Street. The broken object hatches a scrolled quarter of a map that promises to lead anyone assembling all four pieces to a secreted pair of original paintings by Goya and Rembrandt, worth approximately \$8,000,000. Kriminal sets about locating the missing pieces, but finds his plans complicated—not only by his greedy lover (who tries to poison him), but by the craven antiques dealer Robson (“Frank Olivier” aka Armando Francioli) and Mara Gitan (Liné), who hold two of the other missing pieces. A further twist is provided by the impending marriage of Inspector Milton (Bosic), whose fiancée Gloria (Anna Zinnemann)

receives the outstanding Buddha as a wedding gift, requiring Kriminal to crash the reception in audacious disguise.

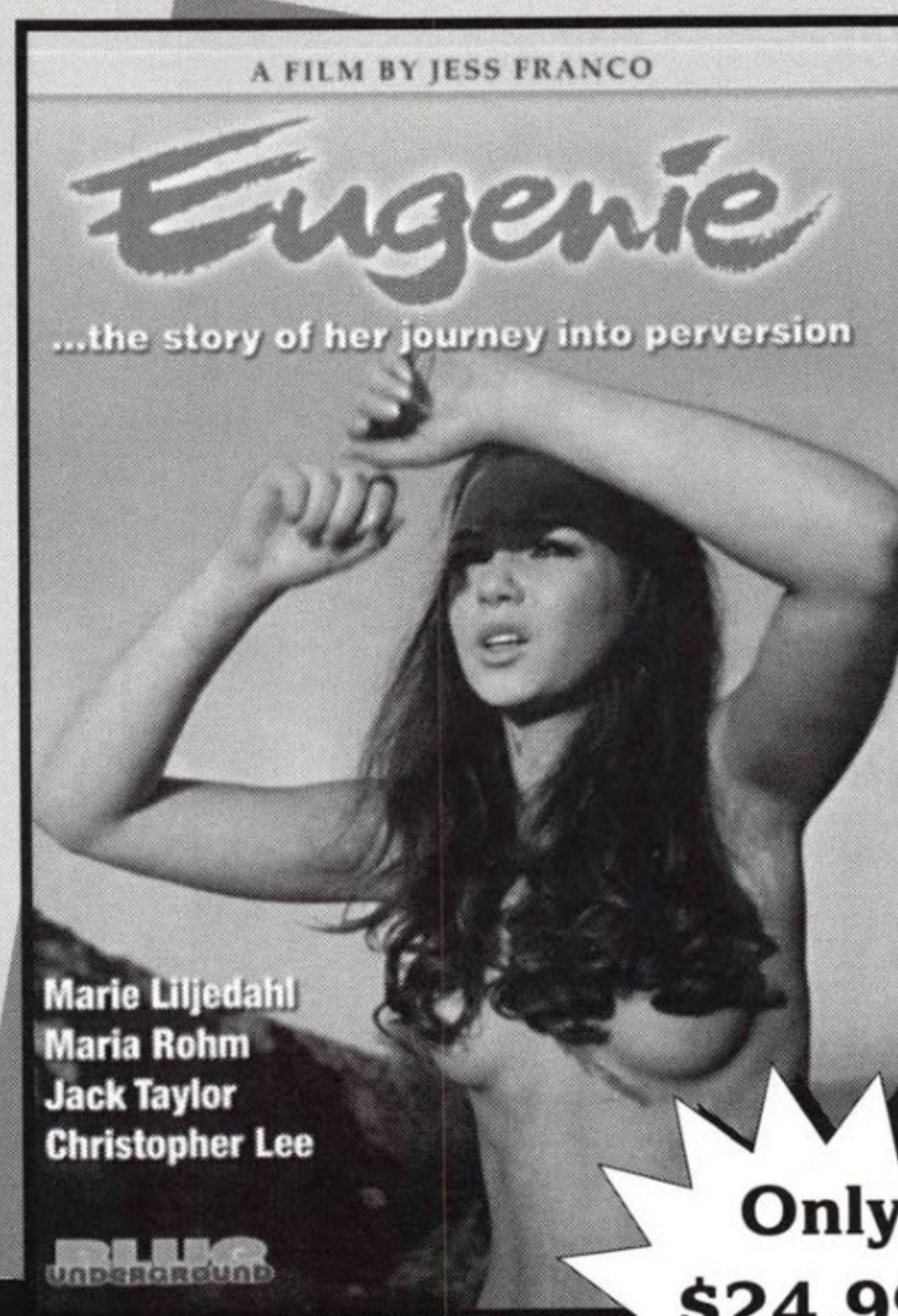
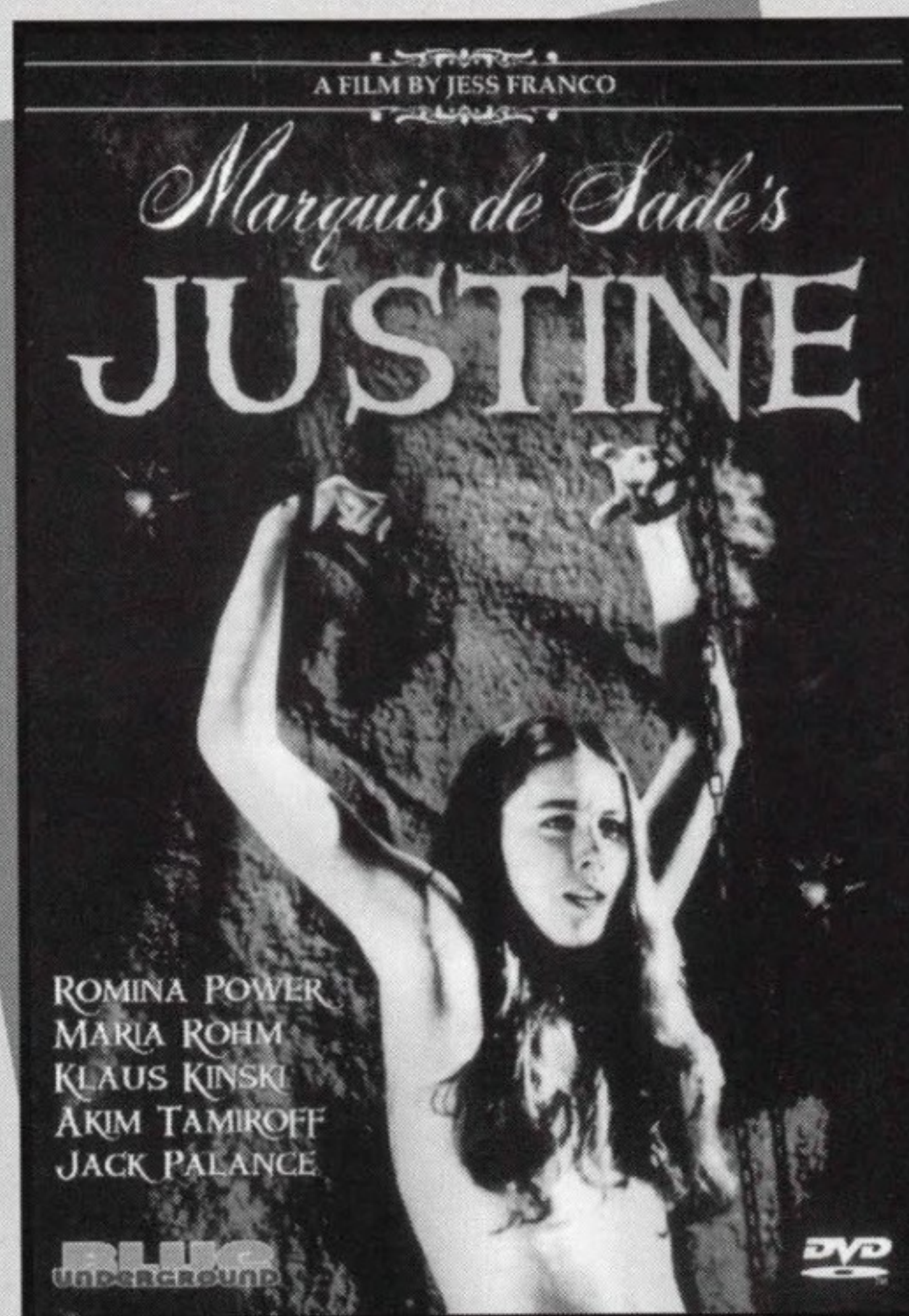
Today, it will be a rare viewer who can watch *Il marchio of Kriminal* without being occasionally reminded of Stephen Sommers’s “Mummy” movies—it too features two somewhat romantically-entwined archaeologists (of a sort) competing toward a common goal in the Middle East (in this case, Lebanon), amid a sense of the fantastic and picturesque ancient ruins unfurled in larger-than-life, widescreen compositions. Angelo Lotti, seconded here to top-billed cameraman Emilio Foriscot (**BLADE OF THE RIPPER, FRANKENSTEIN’S BLOODY TERROR**), helps to deliver a far more consistently vital and attractive film than its predecessor, as do art director Nicola Tamburo (Pasolini’s **MEDEA**) and composer Manuel Parada (retained, like screenwriter Brochero, for *Satanik*), who contributes a more balanced, appropriate score. Since she doesn’t reprise her original character, Liné’s presence adds to the film’s glamour, as does Saxson, if only for the reason that he is given more opportunities to don his skeleton suit.

Once again, Pulp Video’s “Cult Collection” DVD release is a near-flawless rendering, unattractive only by its lack of alternate language tracks (again, Italian dialogue and removable subs only) and a short dupey patch occurring at 17:53-18:20. The Techniscope framing again measures 2.33:1 and blows up to 16:9 handsomely. Skin tones are realistic, and the positive print elements are almost spotless, flawed only by rare, very slight speckling and an errant scratch or two. The 5.1 remix lends an effective jolt value to crashes, car chases, and other loud noises, but purists can also watch the movie in 2.0 mono. There are 16 chapter marks, laid out in an attractive animated menu.

Packaged in keepcases adorned with original Italian poster art, *Kriminal* and *Il marchio di Kriminal* are both available domestically from Xploited Cinema (www.xploitedcinema.com) and come highly recommended. The lack of an English track may daunt many of our readers, but armed with the information included in this review, the storylines will not be difficult to follow.
—Tim Lucas



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By Don G. Smith

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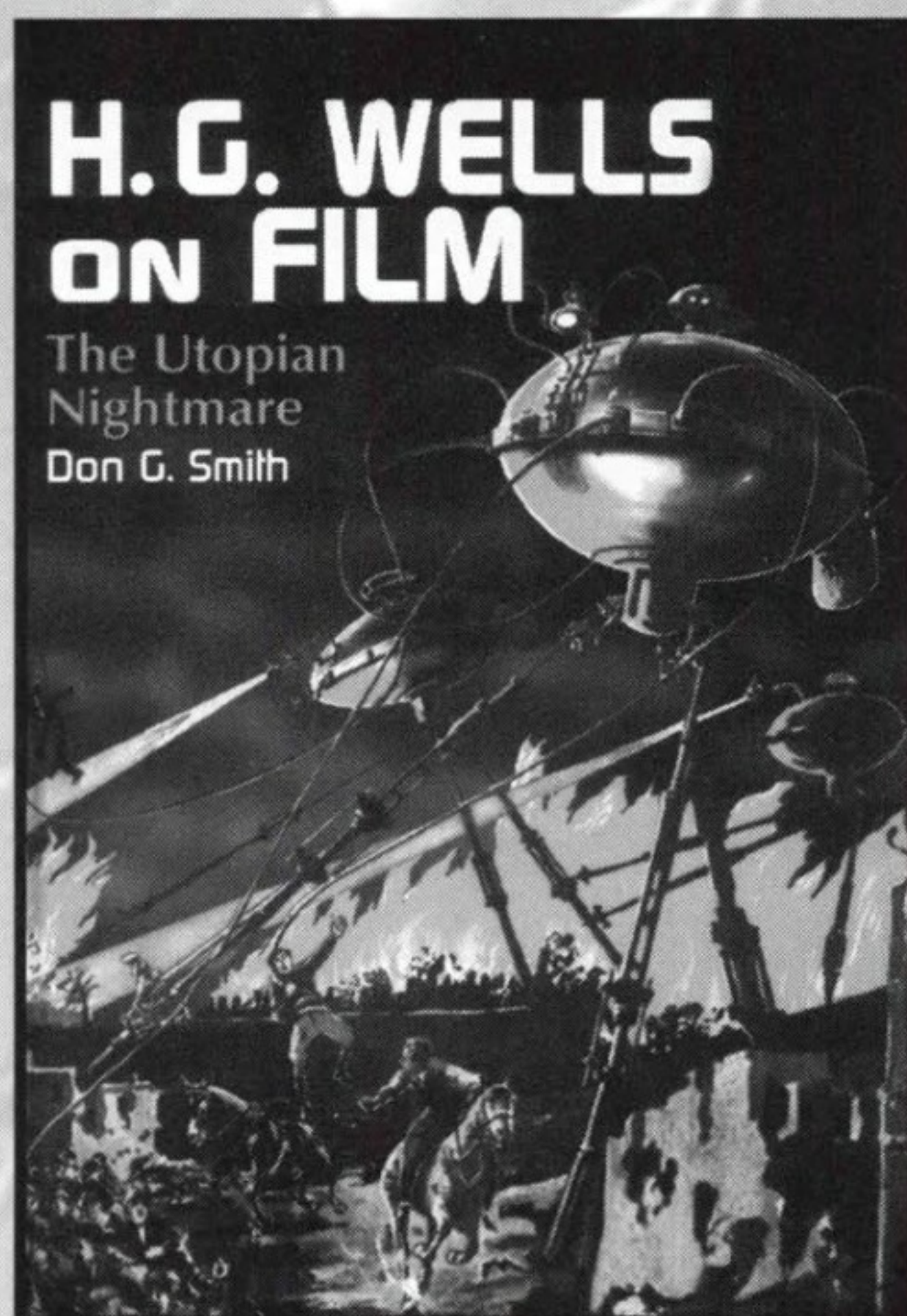
197 pp., \$39.95 (hardcover) plus \$4.00 shipping.

Reviewed by
Anthony Ambrogio

DON G. SMITH, whose previous books include LON CHANEY, JR.: HORROR FILM STAR, 1906-1973 (McFarland, 1996) and THE POE CINEMA: A CRITICAL FILMOGRAPHY OF THEATRICAL RELEASES BASED ON THE WORKS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE (McFarland, 1999), here treats another author whose texts have frequently been adapted for the screen.

After Jules Verne, Herbert George Wells was the second, and probably the more important, progenitor of modern science fiction. His stories display a true sense of wonder and a plethora of ideas. From the turn of the last century to this, from Georges Méliès' *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902—"inspired" by Verne and Wells) to the recent **THE TIME MACHINE** (2002—too recent for inclusion in Smith's book), they have captured the imagination (or at least the fancy) of filmmakers and moviegoers. Smith maintains that, most of the time, motion pictures ignored or soft-pedalled Wells' philosophy but wholeheartedly appropriated his wondrous concepts: time travel, the surgical conversion of beasts into men (as opposed to the supernatural transformation of men into beasts), "scientific" invisibility, and all-out alien invasion.

In 19 chapters, Smith discusses 41 film versions of 14 Wells novels, four short stories, and three "sketches" for the screen. (These include the expected science fiction titles but also several fantasies and five non-fantastic novels.) As Smith explains in his Introduction, each chapter consists of nine parts: (1) "The Novel [Story]" puts the work in its historical context and sometimes gives the circumstances of its creation; (2) "Novel [Story] Scenario and Commentary" summarizes the text and often



discusses it in terms of Wells' ideas and themes; (3) "The Films" provides cast and credits for each adaptation; (4) "Film Synopsis" summarizes each film version; (5) "Adaptation" assesses each film in comparison to the text; (6) "Production and Marketing" treats each film's genesis, provides background credits for its personnel, and discusses its publicity and reception; (7) "Strengths" and (8) "Weaknesses" evaluate each film's positive and negative aspects; and (9) "Rating" ranks each film, from 4 (excellent) to 1 (poor). This scheme neatly arranges the volume, though it causes a certain *sameness* to creep into each chapter (especially parts of "Production and Marketing," which often become a litany of key players' and crew members' other credits).

Smith thoughtfully provides a 20th chapter, his "Afterword," in which he judges the worth of Wells' *oeuvre* and their cinematic versions and predicts which of Wells' works will endure. He also includes

a helpfully annotated bibliography rather than merely listing the titles without comment.

Smith orders the chapters chronologically by publication date of Wells' writing, the better to trace the evolution of the writer's thought. His approach is valid but wreaks havoc with cinema history: the first title to be examined, 1895's *THE TIME MACHINE*, wasn't filmed until 1960, whereas the first film to be made from a Wells story (*Le Voyage dans la Lune*) isn't discussed until Chapter 8, "THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON." And the book ends with a whimper, not a bang: the last picture discussed is the cheapjack "remake," **THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME** (1979). Still, his sequential grouping of adaptations within a chapter does have its advantages: this is probably the first time anyone has ever done a comparative analysis of all five film adaptations of *THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU*.

Throughout the book, Smith reiterates his major premise—that Wells' brand of "socialism" made him, if not quite a *National Socialist*, then a "Rational" Socialist—one who believed "that humankind could only be saved if a devoted group of planners could establish and impose a new pattern of living on the masses" (p. 172), a position perhaps best exemplified by **THINGS TO COME** (1936), with its benevolent tyrannical technocracy, whose scenario Wells himself adapted from his 1933 novel *THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME*. Throughout, Smith also reiterates his secondary premise—that the movies, except for the aforementioned **THINGS TO COME**, failed to express Wells' thinking: "Films based on his writings were produced for the 'mindless masses' that he tried to awaken. Unfortunately for him, those film adaptations usually catered to the climate of opinion adopted by the same 'mindless masses.' In the end, the cinema must be viewed as an entity opposed to Wells' ideas" (p. 186).

As evidence, Smith argues that the movies turned such Wellsian "heroes" as Dr. Moreau and Griffin (the Invisible Man) into mad scientists who Tamper with Things Best Left Alone; jettisoned the philosophy from *FOOD OF THE GODS*, retaining only the gigantism; and perverted *THE TIME MACHINE*'s satirical *dénouement* into a more palatable upbeat ending (in which the "sub-humanly bovine" Weena [p. 11], who dies in the book, becomes the Time Traveller's child-like girlfriend).

Smith suggests what others have advanced: that, in *WAR OF THE WORLDS*, Wells may have been creating an allegory of Tasmania's natives, decimated by Europeans (see p. 101). But any critique of colonialism in the novel had long since vanished by the time the eponymous 1953 film was released. The movie exemplifies that cautionary "keep watching

the skies" attitude so prevalent in '50s science fiction. The law of unintended consequences prevails: no one watching the film connects the invasion to exploitation in the third world but instead condemns those filthy SOBs from outer space who're trying to conquer *us*! (And, while bacteria save the human race in Wells' novel, in real life the contagion usually went the other way, as various indigenous peoples were felled by diseases carried by invading colonizers.)

Smith details other changes. Like adaptations of *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, which early on acquired a female for each personality (unlike Stevenson's distaffless story), so, too, did *ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU* pick up a pair of women for its first screen incarnation, **ISLAND OF LOST SOULS** (1933)—and at least one of them (usually the panther woman) reappeared in all subsequent versions.

Smith suggests that some of these alterations are not bad and are possibly improvements. James Whale's **THE INVISIBLE MAN** (1933) introduces a side effect of the invisibility drug: madness—which, more than the criminal-brain MacGuffin in Whale's **FRANKENSTEIN** (1931), creates higher drama, "allows for audience identification with the invisible man" (p. 67), and reflects a well-known truth about untested drugs (their unintended consequences)—thus linking Jack Griffin to Henry Jekyll. Smith shows how madness and invisibility remained linked in the movies throughout Universal's sequels to the 1957 Mexican remake, *El Hombre Que Logró Ser Invisible*. (You can find it in recent works, too—eg., **HOLLOW MAN** [2000]).

A reader may not accept every aspect of Smith's appraisal, but he's done his homework and knows Wells thoroughly. Some readers might argue with Smith's film rankings (**THE INVISIBLE MAN** is his only 4: **ISLAND OF LOST SOULS**, **WAR OF THE WORLDS**, and the Wells-scripted **MAN WHO COULD WORK MIRACLES** (1936), and **THINGS TO COME** rate a 3.5) but not with his coverage: he even includes lost films and stills from some of them (including **BLUE-BOTTLES** [1928], the first screen teaming of Elsa Lanchester and Charles Laughton). One might wish that Smith would have dealt with the Wellsian themes borrowed by so many movies *not* officially adapted from Wells' writing, but the author remains true to his title and sticks to his subject. This volume is a complete reference to H.G. Wells on film (1902-1997), period. In that, it succeeds solidly.

But beware the occasional typo: the Introduction gives Wells' dates as 1866-1946 (p.1); four pages later, we're told "H.G. Wells was born... on September 21, 1886" (p.5), which would mean that he wrote *THE TIME MACHINE* as a nine-year-old prodigy! To have written it at 29 is impressive enough.





By Douglas E. Winter

Craig Armstrong

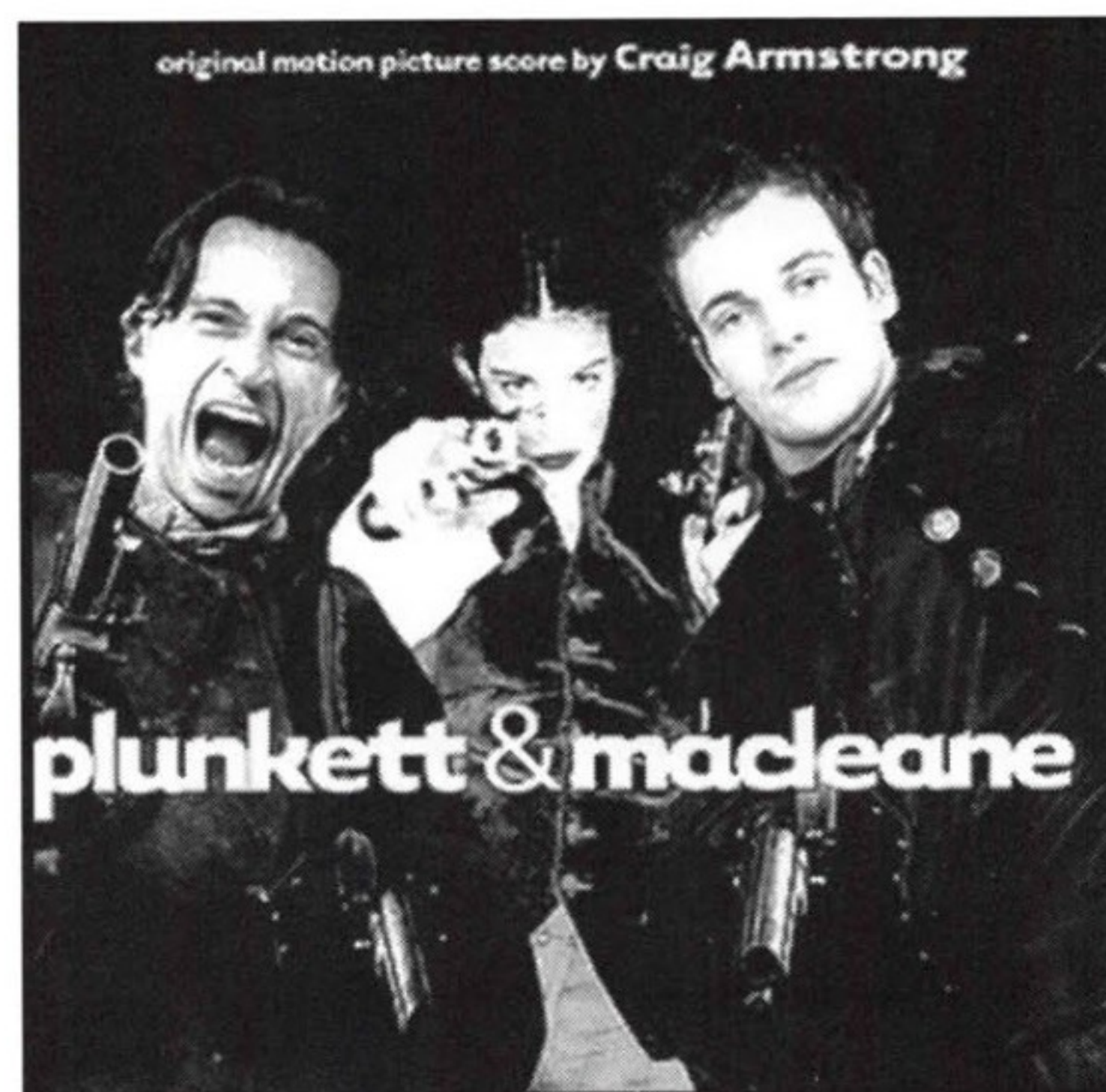
Hailed as the master of post-modern film music, Craig Armstrong won the Golden Globe Award for his original score for Baz Luhrmann's controversial musical **MOULIN ROUGE**—which, ironically, was overshadowed by the film's love-it-or-hate-it song score. A student of the Royal Academy of Music, Armstrong is a multi-faceted talent whose willingness to embrace classical, avant-garde, electronic, and rock styles has sent him on an ever-spiralling career path as a composer of orchestral and film music; an arranger for the likes of U2, Björk, Massive Attack, and Madonna; and, more recently, a performer, with two “solo” albums, **THE SPACE BETWEEN US** (1998) and this year's **AS IF TO NOTHING**.

After a 1980s apprenticeship in avant-garde and art projects, Armstrong formed the Glasgow-based rock duo Hope with vocalist Louise Rutkowski. Their only compact disc, **KINDNESS OF STRANGERS** (1993), threaded operatic, alternative, and techno sensibilities into a preview of great things to come. A series of high visibility string arrangements—for **MISSION IMPOSSIBLE**, **GOLDENEYE** and **BATMAN FOREVER** (U2's “Thrill Me, Kissin's **ROMEO & JULIET** (1996); but the film's initial soundtrack CD eschewed his music in favor of a song compilation. The underscore finally appeared on **ROMEO & JULIET VOLUME 2** (Capitol CDP 7243



8 55567 2 2, \$15.99, 25 tracks, 65m 47s), although some cues contain film dialogue and/or sound effects. The “Balcony Scene” cue is reprised on the atmospheric **THE SPACE BETWEEN US** (Melankolic/ Astralwerks/Caroline CAR 9627-2, \$16.99, 12 tracks, 58m 24s), whose other tracks feature vocals from Elizabeth Fraser (Cocteau Twins) and Paul Buchanan (Blue Nile).

Despite the success of **MOULIN ROUGE**, Armstrong's film music continues to find mixed representation on CD. His scores for **ORPHANS** (1997), **THE QUIET AMERICAN** (2001), and the Oscar-winning documentary **ONE DAY IN SEPTEMBER** (1999) have not been released, while his Mahleresque music for **THE BONE COLLECTOR** (1999) is currently available only in a German edition, *DER KNOCHENJÄGER*. A strong



compilation disc for **BEST LAID PLANS** (1999) includes his somber cues, but the soundtrack CD for **KISS OF THE DRAGON** (2001) contains none of his compositions, simply songs from the usual MTV suspects.

Even the two commercial soundtrack CDs for **MOULIN ROUGE** ignore Armstrong's award-winning score. The initial disc, **MOULIN ROUGE** (Interscope 606949 3035 2, \$18.98, 15 tracks, 56m 59s), presents studio takes of songs from the film, many in cover versions or remixes that did not appear on screen. **MOULIN ROUGE 2** (Interscope 606949 3228 2, \$18.98, 11 tracks, 42m 54s) features songs as actually heard in the film, along with the Armstrong-arranged instrumental of "Your Song," and one cue from his original underscore, "Ascension" (although paired with the vocal "Nature Boy"). As a result, Armstrong's complete underscore is available only to persistent searchers—and only in expensive promotional copies (Blue Focus, 13 tracks, 42m 01s).

But take heart: What is arguably Armstrong's best score is in the bins: **PLUNKETT & MACLEANE** (Melankolic/ Astralwerks 0170 4 6260 2 6, \$18.98, 20 tracks, 50m 44s) represents Armstrong at his most inspired, reconciling liturgical chorales and ominous electronic/orchestral atmospheres with contemporary house beats—an overlooked masterpiece among recent film music.

Armstrong's second solo album, **AS IF TO NOTHING** (Melankolic/ Astralwerks 7234 8 11907 2 2, \$18.98, 15 tracks, 69m 07s), again features prominent vocalists—Bono (U2) and Evan Dando (Lemonheads—but the electronic/ orchestral project is more akin to an imaginary soundtrack,

and includes an elegant homage to King Crimson's dire epic "Starless."

For more information, visit craigarmstrong.com and melankolic.astralwerks.com/craig_armstrong.

Bruno Coulais

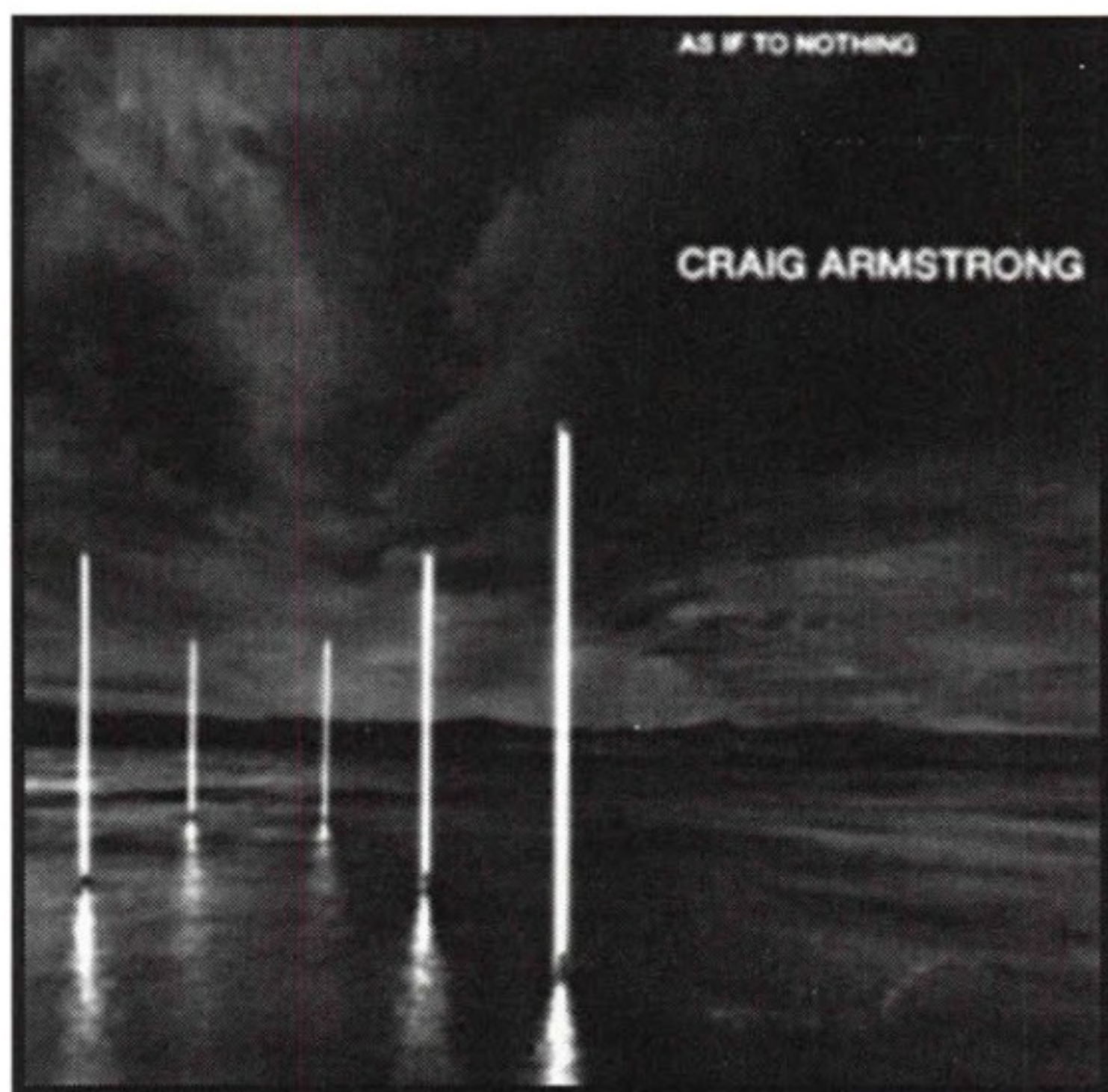
In many ways, Bruno Coulais represents a Continental counterpart of Craig Armstrong. Although composing since the late 1970s, he came into his own as a soundtrack artist in the 1990s with music that often brings popular aesthetics, including beats and samples, to skillful classically-based compositions and arrangements. Working almost solely on French productions, he has collaborated with cult rock icons like Nick Cave and Robert Wyatt on *LE PEUPLE MIGRATEUR* (2001), and is known for an affinity with "world music," as exemplified by his score for *HIMALAYA: L'ENFANCE D'UN CHEF* (1999), for which he won Les César—the French Oscar (his second, having won in 1997 for his music for **MICROCOSMOS**). In addition to his scores for **Les Rivières Pourpres** ("The Crimson Rivers") and **HARRISON'S FLOWERS** (both 2000), two recent releases finding their way stateside are definitely worthy of note.

Coulais' soundtrack for Pitof's *VIDOCQ* (Universal/ULM 014 924-2, France, approx. \$19.99, 27 tracks, 51m 38s), is a clever collage of electronic/ orchestral cues written in seeming homage to the grand tradition of genre horror and suspense music: chiming keyboard sequences, organ swells, orchestral trills, brooding strings, ghostly choirs. Like the film itself, it is self-conscious without descending to parody. This disc concludes with the stirring end title, "Hope Vol. 2," written and performed by Apocalyptica and Matthias Sayer of German metalheads Farmer Boys.

BELPHEGOR: LE FANTÔME DU LOUVRE (WEA/Warner Music France 85738 7599 2, France, approx. \$19.99, 17 tracks, 54m 40s) is the superior score, however, with a unique mingling of orchestral cues recorded in Paris and ethnic North African cues recorded in Egypt, layered onto contemporary beats to create a hypnotic collision of cultures. Like *HIMALAYA*, it is Coulais at his best, and not to be missed.

Those who read French will want to visit frank.borsato.free.fr/bc/launch.htm.

Review materials should be sent c/o One Eyed Dog, PO Box 27305, Washington DC 20038. The Audio Watchdog is on-line at OnEyeDog@aol.com.



THE LETTERBOX



AWAITING THE GREAT 11

I read with interest Tim's editorial about compiling his "10 Best Movies of All Time" list [VW 87:3], and the issues it naturally brought to mind. I, too, have encountered this phenomenon while playing various 10 Best/Desert Island Movies games with fellow movie nuts. There are no horror movies on my list either (**LA DOLCE VITA**, **JULES AND JIM**, **LAWRENCE OF ARABIA**, **THE GODFATHER PART II**, **BLOW-UP**, **VERTIGO**, **ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST**, **HOLIDAY**, **FORBIDDEN GAMES** and **THE SEARCHERS**) despite my life long fascination

with these films, and the fact that I buy VW, ASIAN CULT CINEMA, and PSYCHOTRONIC far more often than FILM COMMENT.

I have a theory about this. In trying to choose what particular cult film I want to watch on any evening, I often find that I don't want to watch any existing Hercules movie; rather, I want to watch that perfect Hercules movie that I carry in my head, the result of all the most endearing qualities of all the *pepla* I've ever seen, rolled into one. I don't want watch any of the Hammers in my collection, either; I want to watch one that combines the script and direction of **BRIDES OF**

DRACULA, Christopher Lee's performance from Franco's **COUNT DRACULA** and the cinematography and art direction from Coppola's **BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA**, all smooshed into one, great Dracula flick. In other words, the glimpses of Awe, Wonder, Fantasy, and the Struggle with the Mysteries of Life and Death that appear in the genre films we love so well, conglomerate into a mental filmic universe of our own making, one into which we tap, and with which we

James Bentley and Alakina Mann in an epistolary moment from THE OTHERS.

make contact every time we watch one of these films, but which ceases to be represented fully by no particular one.

The single thread that does appear in my list—and, I think, in yours—is that all these films 1) create a seamless, perfect, unique, and utterly believable world of their own, one in which we dwell for weeks after seeing them; and 2) express a level of universal essential life truth, which leaves us in jaw-dropping transport, because they have permanently affected our life view and who we are.

Maybe it is a function of the constraints of the marketplace (or budget), or the temperament of the people who make these films, but the sad truth is, that no genre film [I've seen] has yet achieved that universal quality, though a few (**RIFIFI**, **INFERNO**, **ALIEN**, **THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN**, Karl Freund's **THE MUMMY**) are great works of art, and have come close... Someday, someone will combine all the elements we love so well in these classic fairy tales we call genre movies, into one, great transcendent work of universal art, and we'll (like the amps in Spinal tap) have to add an "eleven" to our lists.

Kristoffer Tronerud
Blackstone, MA

JOINING THE FOREIGN REGION

My compliments, as always, on a great job with VW. Bill Cooke's piece on John Frank- enheimer [VW 87:38] was excellent. It occurred to me to drop you a line since yesterday I ordered a copy of the Region 2/ PAL 25th Anniversary DVD of **THE HOUSE WITH THE WINDOWS THAT LAUGH**. I know that you do occasionally mention Region 2 discs, and have also

heavily covered the Japanese releases of Godzilla and Gamera films, but have you thought about expanding your coverage? Not only is there terrific European material available, but the recent wave of outstanding Japanese horror films like **Kairo** and **CURE** (not to mention Korean and Hong Kong offshoots like **Sorum** and **THE EYE**) certainly bears discussion.

These discs are becoming more readily available through online dealers (if you can't get to your local Chinatown), and even the players themselves are edging into public view. Kim's—the biggest alternative video store in New York—now sells a Daewoo all-region, PAL-playable machine, and even Amazon has one for sale. I just picked up a Malata online that solves the PAL anamorphic problem for those of us without widescreen sets. Let's face it, with the arrival of the American remake of **RING** [*Ringu*], this may be the only way for American fans to see the original for the foreseeable future, not to mention many other great new and old films.

In any case, I hope this is food for thought.

Don Kaye
Brooklyn, NY

Actually, there is an Import "caboose" which has been appended to our DVD section for some time; it was originally called "Other Regions." It's true that there's a wealth of great product being released on DVD around the world, and it's certainly our calling to cover it for you—but the big question for us remains, How much space can we grant to imports on a regular basis when there is already more domestic product coming out than we can adequately cover, even in a monthly forum? That said, our Import coverage

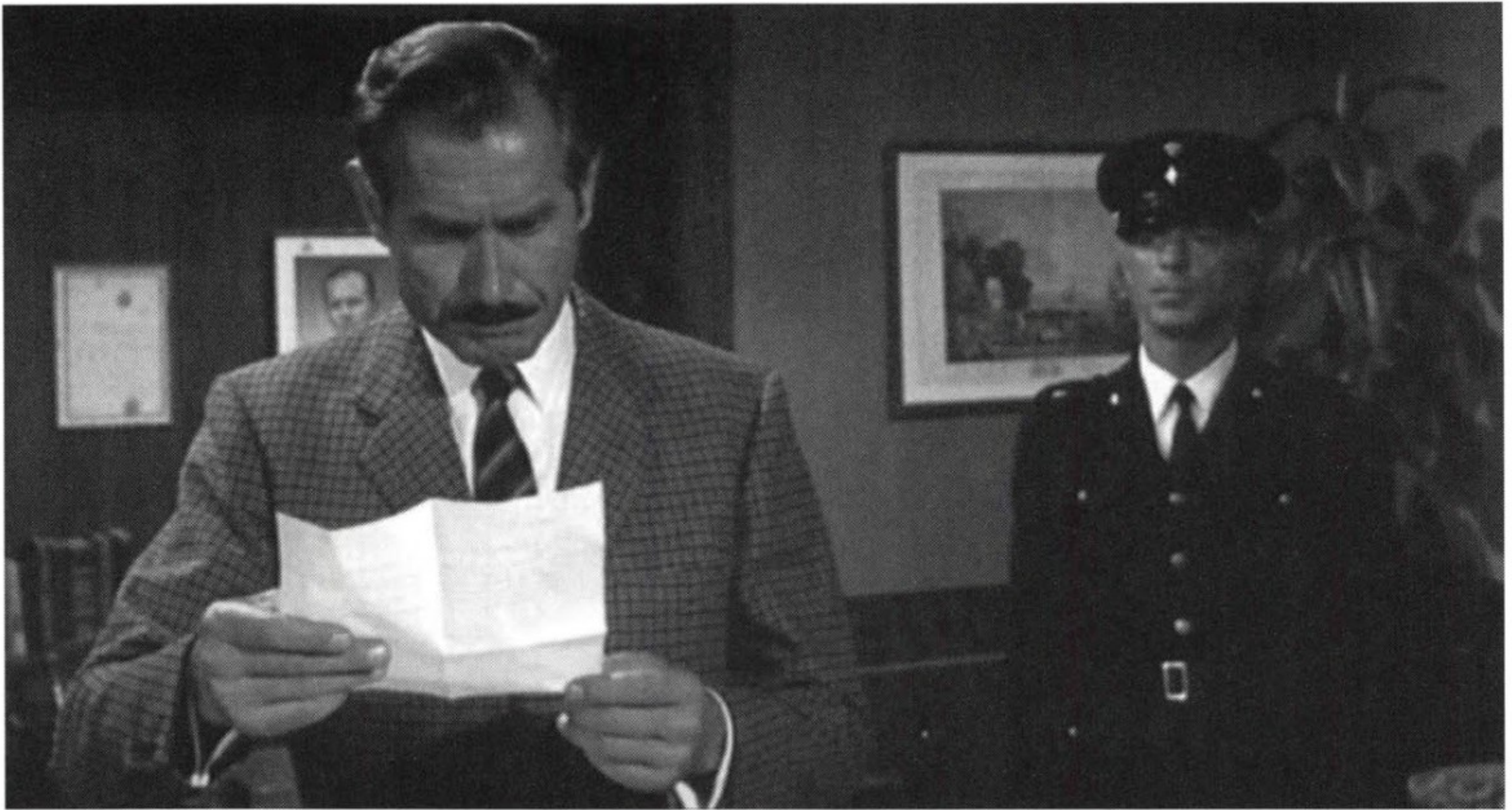
has been expanding, slowly but surely, and you can expect more. Richard Harland Smith is already at work on a special Import feature about the various RING movies available around the world on DVD.

REQUIEMS FOR AN UNSHOWN FILM AND AN UNWRITTEN REVIEW

Let me start off by saying how much I enjoyed the **SECONDS** review in the latest issue. The film has always been a favorite of mine and Bill Cooke delivered an excellent critique of what I believe to be one of the great underrated films of the 1960s.

I thought I would relay something that happened just south of Cincinnati after seeing Tim mention Deodato's **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST** as one of the ten greatest horror films ever made. Earlier in the year, it was announced via posters and a trailer that the film would be showing at Lexington's last "art house" theater in the new, restored version that's been touring the country. A month or so went by after the first announcement when, one Friday, it finally arrived in town for a showing that Midnight. Literally a few hours after the morning paper was printed with the announcement, all traces of the film vanished. The poster was gone from the lobby, the trailer was pulled and, without explanation, the film never played Lexington.

I found this all incredibly sad and a more than a little ironic, considering that a simple trip to Best Buy, right down the road, a person could pick up Lenzi's **CANNIBAL FEROX** for under \$15. No doubt, when **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST** hits DVD, Lexington will welcome it with open arms.



Scotland Yard's Inspector Milton (Andrea Bosis)
receives an unexpected letter from his arch-enemy, KRIMINAL.

Considering the incredible events of the last few years, with so many great Euro horror and art titles becoming easily available in uncut formats, this sighting of Big Brother was more than a bit sobering.

Finally, I also have a question. I have been stunned, as I receive each new issue, that there hasn't been a review of **REQUIEM FOR A DREAM**. Honestly, after seeing this incredible film during its limited run in Lexington (they didn't pull that one, thankfully), I expected a major article from VW. I take it, after reading Richard Harland Smith's reference to the film in his review of **REEFER MADNESS**, that he doesn't like the film, but I think you're magazine is overlooking one of the most important American films from the past several years. Just wondering if anything is in the works.

Jeremy
e-mail

*No, nothing in the works on **REQUIEM FOR A DREAM**. I've been impressed by the Hubert*

*Selby, Jr. novels I've read, but this adaptation didn't work for me either, frankly, and I wasn't put off by the film in a way that made me want to put pen to paper. That it was a marginal title for us, at a time when so much is coming out that is "right up our alley," was also a factor in our not covering it. Incidentally, **CANNIBAL HO-LOCAUST** has fallen off my horror list in favor of a much better film that didn't occur to me as I was compiling my Top Ten: Nicolas Roeg's **DON'T LOOK NOW**.*

TWO PEOPLE WALK INTO A BAR

I thought your readers might be interested to learn that a scene has been altered for Warner Home Video's DVD release of Michael Wadleigh's 1981 horror thriller **WOLFEN**.

Approximately 45m into the film, Dewey Wilson (Albert Finney) and Rebecca Neff (Diane Venora) walk into a bar,

shaken up by their first direct encounter with the "Wolfen." In the theatrical release, this scene was accompanied by shots of Tom Waits playing the piano and performing the song "Jitterbug Boy." This piece of music acted as the soundtrack for the whole scene. On the DVD, all reference to Waits has been removed, including his music from the shots in which he does not appear. In total, two pieces of footage have been removed. The first runs for 30s:

Wilson and Neff enter the bar and walk across the room.

Cut to Tom Waits at the piano.

Wilson and Neff with their drinks in hand move over to some seating.

NEFF (referring to the pianist):
Who was that?

WILSON: He owns the place.

The scene continues on the DVD without music on the soundtrack.

Neff and Wilson sit down.

NEFF: Ah, I haven't been in a place like this since school... You really know how to treat a woman, Wilson.

WILSON: This isn't a date, Neff.

The second edit occurs at this point losing 10s of footage.

Close up on Tom Waits as he continues playing.

The scene continues on the DVD without music on the soundtrack.

NEFF: What do you think it was?

WILSON: Kids... junkies... hallucinations. I don't know.

NEFF: (pauses) Have you killed anyone?

WILSON: Well, I wounded someone once... I shot a rookie in the leg, cleaning my gun in the locker room, second week in uniform.

NEFF: Have you?

WILSON: Why don't you ask how many?

Although no information vital to the story is lost from this truncated scene, the removal of the music results in an unusually quiet episode, especially when compared to the rest of the exceptionally busy soundtrack. The scene remains intact in the British television version, as screened by Channel Four, but fails to preserve the original aspect ratio of 2:35:1 beyond the opening credits, opting instead for the more "widescreen friendly" 1:85:1. The original home rental VHS released in 1983 in 1:33:1 contains the same altered version of the scene as the DVD.

Did the studio go back to the wrong master for the DVD? Or were they once again too miserly

to pay music royalties for the use of the Waits song on the home market release? At least the DVD preserves the glorious 2:35:1 aspect ratio.

WOODSTOCK, the only other feature film directed by Wadleigh, was given the "director's cut" treatment, adding an additional 40m to the movie. Since Wadleigh has claimed in the past that **WOLFEN** was much edited by Orion beyond his original brief, it would have been nice to have seen him involved in a "director's cut" edition of this movie, not only restoring the missing scene and music, but also restoring the film to his original vision. It is also disappointing that an audio commentary wasn't included. **WOLFEN** is a much underrated and overlooked film that deserves far more attention than has so far been bestowed upon it. My initial excitement at the prospect of the DVD release has turned sour, as it has proved just another example of the poor treatment this film seems destined to receive.

David Valentine
e-mail

*I like **WOLFEN** too, but whereas **WOODSTOCK** was restored in part to generate a further theatrical release during the festival's 25th anniversary, I'm certain that Wadleigh's second feature never had similar prospects in Warners's eyes. I don't know whether Wadleigh refused an invitation to provide a commentary, but it's very possible that invitation was never extended.*

CLEAVING TO THE FAN

Alright, alright, it's not a classic, and no one probably cares. Released in 1981 to stinging reviews and horrible box office,

THE FAN sank without a trace, and few remember it, but why would Paramount Home Entertainment see fit to edit a line from this unsung camp classic?

Check out this line at the 57:17 mark: "Dearest Bitch, I've exhausted myself on thinking of ways to kill you." On the old VHS version, the line is read somewhat differently: "Dearest Bitch, See how accessible you are? How would you liked to be fucked with a meat cleaver?"

Why the change? Only Paramount knows for sure, but since the rest of the film appears intact, including all the gore, the edit is even more odd. It's not the TV version, or edited for airlines, so this has to gone down as one more of those puzzling DVD mysteries likely never to get solved...

Peter M. Bracke
e-mail

EVERYBODY MUST GET STONE

If any VW readers want to see or own **HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE** but don't want to import a PAL copy from the UK, they should try the Canadian version. It's the same 152m NTSC Region 1 DVD as the US release (with the same features and packaging), but the cover art and film dialogue both reference "the Philosopher's Stone rather than "the Sorcerer's Stone." The only other difference between the Canadian and US version is the language and subtitle selection is English/French and not English/Spanish.

Thunder DVD will ship the widescreen Canadian DVD version to the US for about \$20 USD.

Craig Hamilton
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Available online from www.thunderdvd.com.

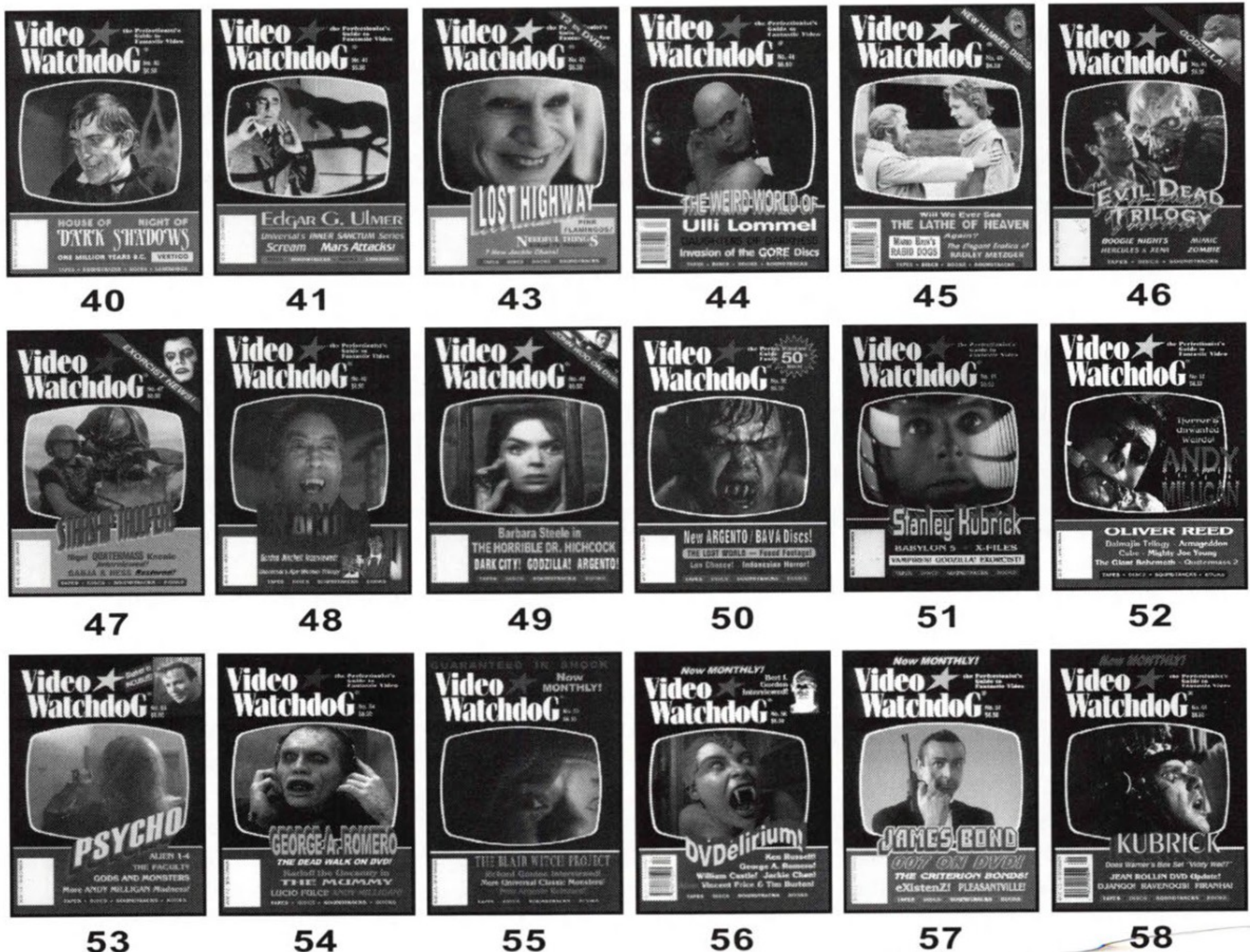


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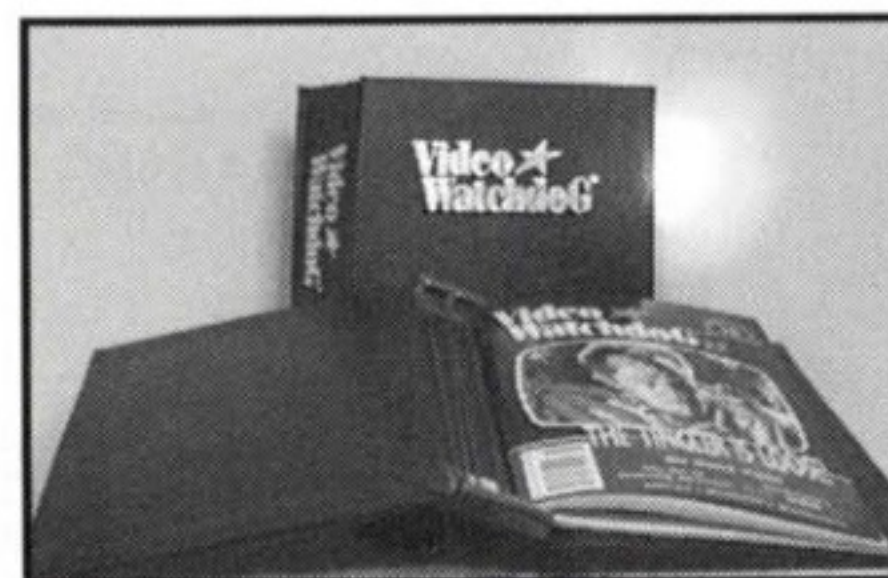
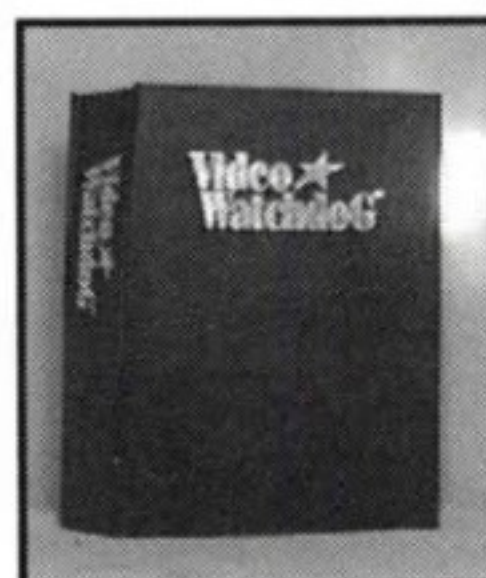
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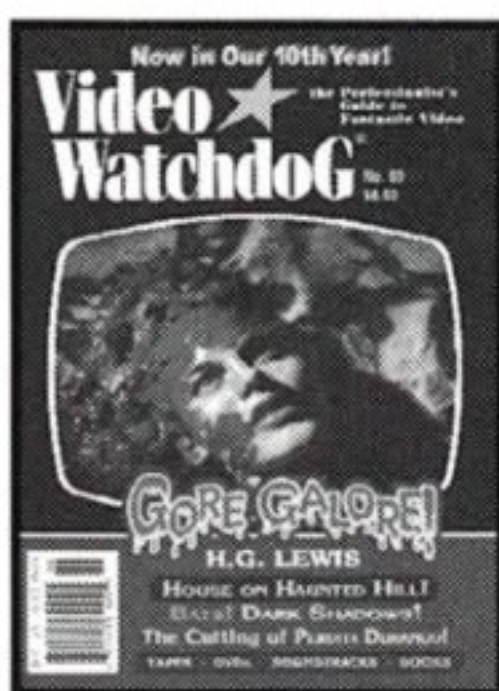
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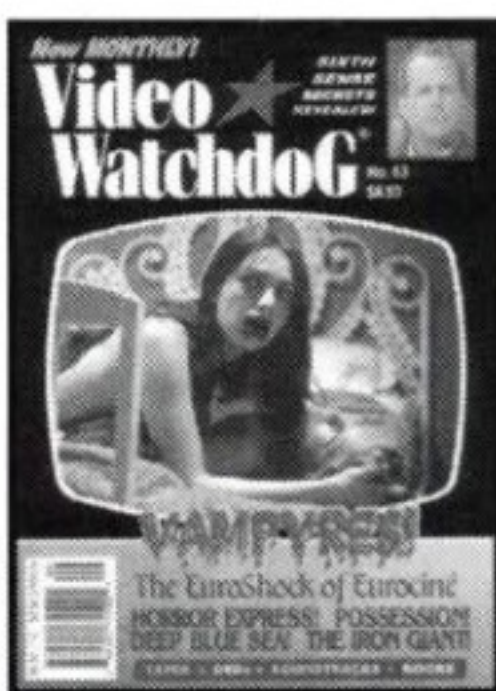
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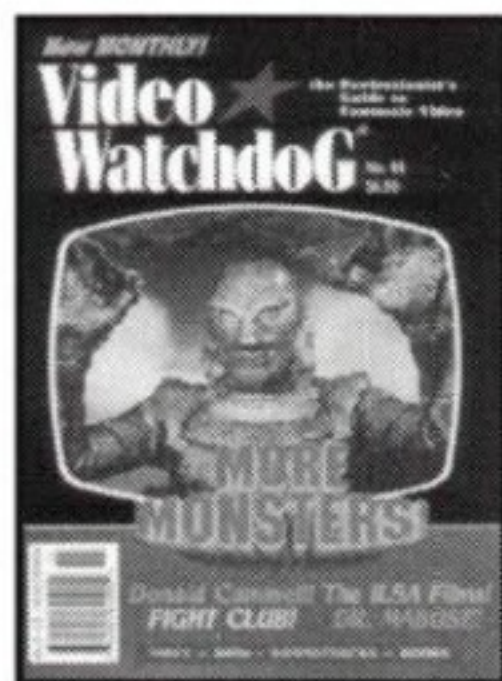
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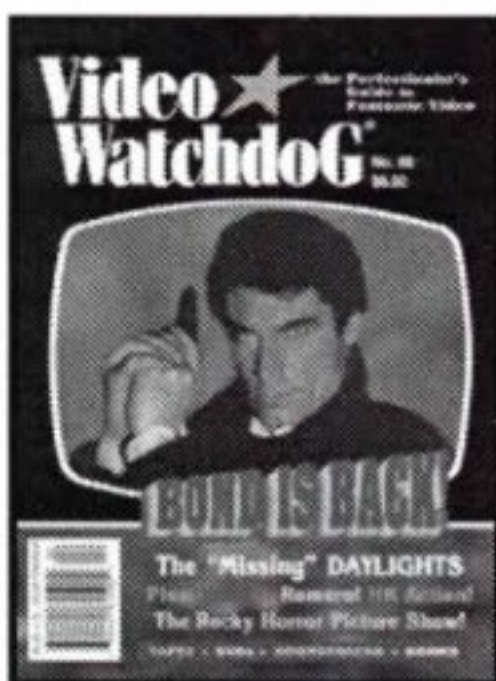
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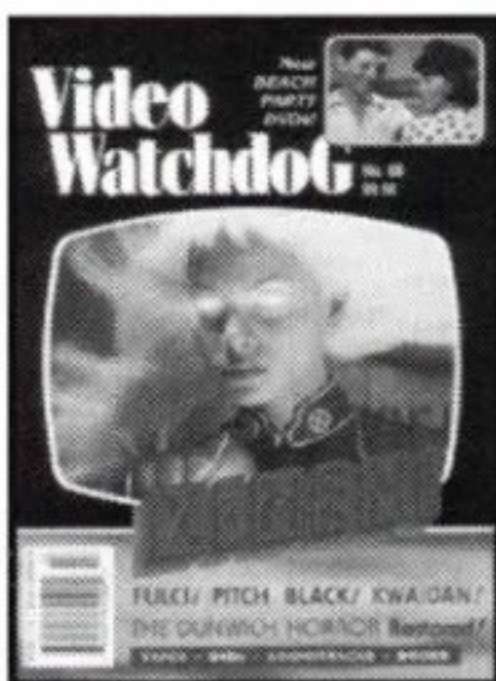
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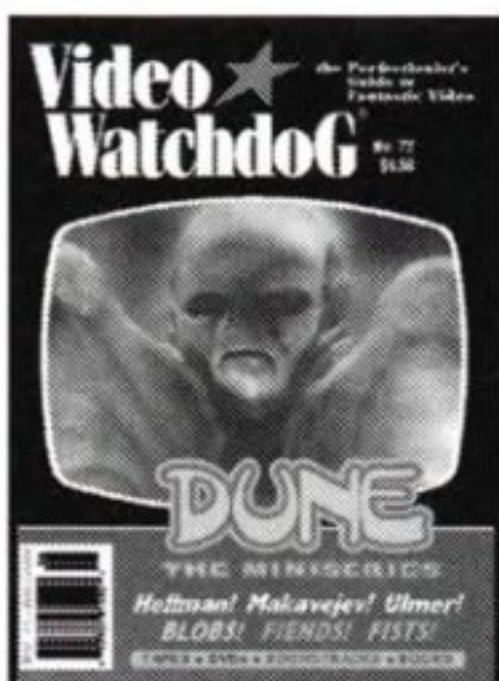
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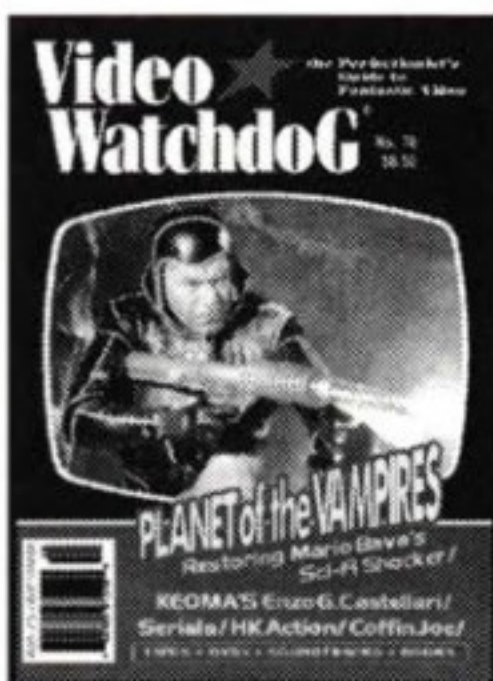
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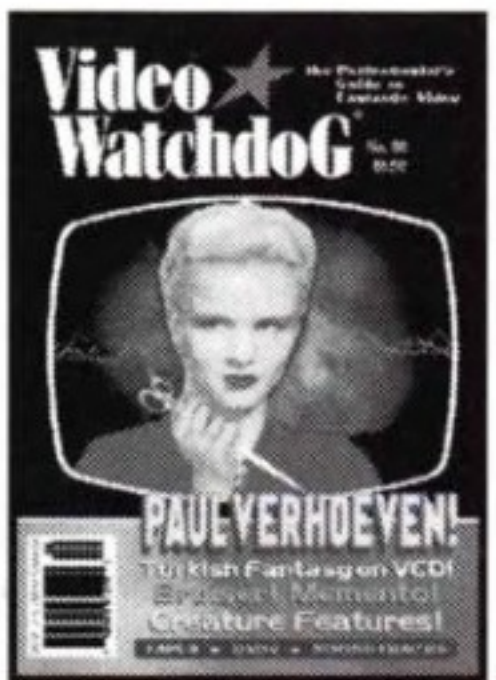
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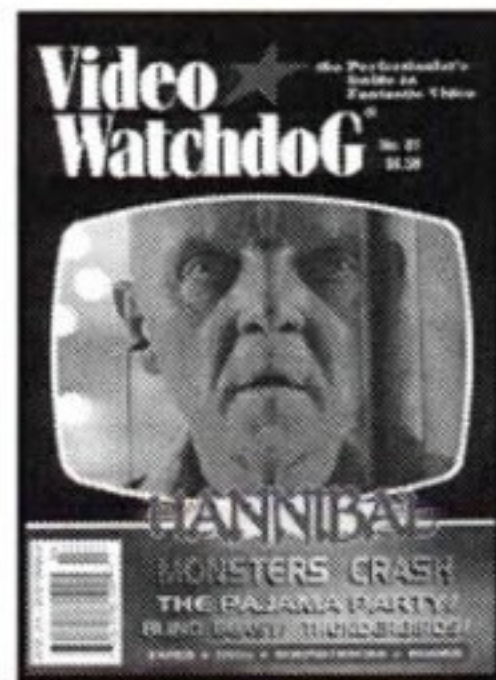
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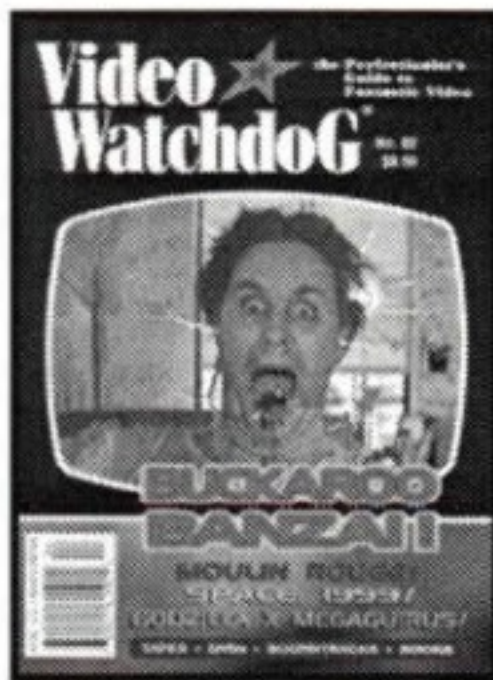
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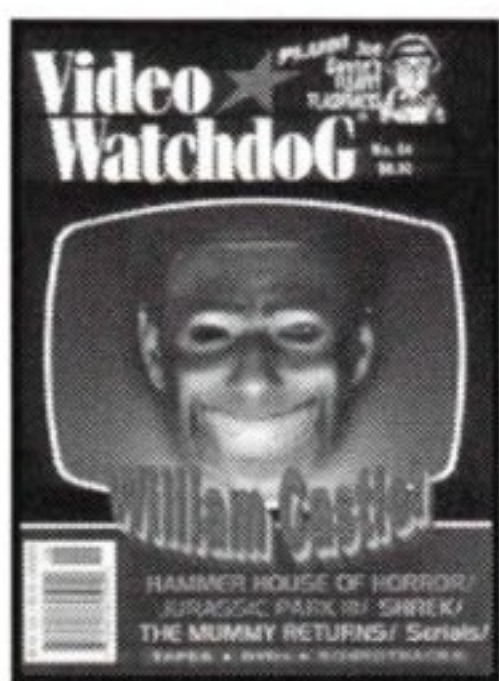
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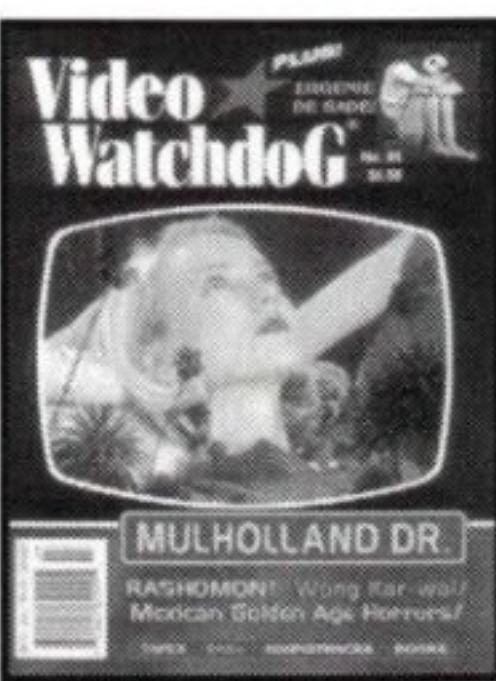
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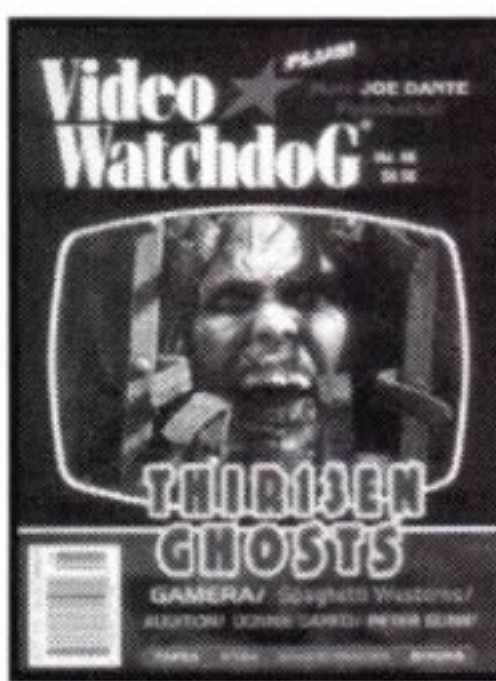
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